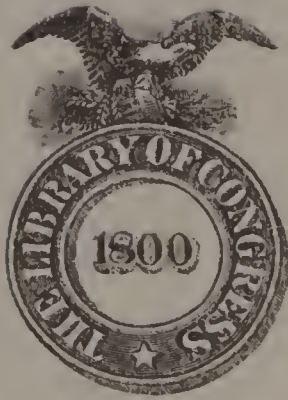


**THE
THREE
STAGES
OF
CLARINDA
THORBALD**

WILLIAM T. HAMILTON, JR.



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The Three Stages of
Clarinda Thorbald

WILLIAM T. HAMILTON, Jr.

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Clarinda Thorbald

BY

WILLIAM T. HAMILTON, Jr. ✓
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To my family

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The Three Stages of
Clarinda Thorbald

STAGE ONE

The Three Stages of Clarinda Thorbald

I

In the soft light of an afternoon sun, Clarinda sat in an old chair and read a thesis upon love, and she found set forth in this thesis that without love the world would not go around. Further, without love life would be but dross and hideous calamity. She also found therein that men have died from love, and women have languished in torments when it was unrequited.

Even though she was filled with apprehension as she read, she did not wish to eschew love, but was glad she was suffering from its effects.

She imagined that her own particular love was different from the love anybody had ever been consumed with, and she was glad in her heart she was suffering from its effects. She perceived it affected the glint of her hair, and she even thought it affected the beauty of her smile. She knew it affected her eyes, and gave an added color to her cheeks.

At times when she sat by herself, she was filled with fear that the object of her love might fail her—that what she felt might be a dream and not a real condition.

At times this trepidation was so overwhelming she became frightened. It might occur that she would awake from her blissful state and find it was all a mistake. She even thought that it might not have happened—that the man she loved upon a certain night, at a certain place had whispered in her ear that without her love life would be a void.

Clarinda was young and believed in love, and she had not found out that love dies even as the body, and often becomes stale, that more than often it passed from the soul as the miasma from the fetid lake.

Nevertheless, from the time love awoke in her heart, and the man had whispered in her ear and held her close to his breast, day followed day.

Day followed day and the hour of her wedding came, and never once did time stand still. And when it was at hand she awoke with the sun and sprang from her bed as light as the lark, with her hair hanging in golden strands over her shoulders.

Lightly she ran to the window and pushing it open the air rushed in. A luxurious breeze

swayed the tree-tops, and the flowers in the fields still covered with dew gave forth untold perfume.

She threw aside the curtains that kept from within the glory of the day, and a flood of light burst into the room. A great gladness came to her heart for there was no cloud in the sky. As if to add a better omen, across the garden in a sycamore tree a bird trilled its morning song.

A smile soft and sweet crossed her lips and gradually expanded into a laugh that vied with the song of the bird in the tree.

Clarinda was thrilled, and her heart went out to meet the lover who would come.

When she turned from the sun and the day without and the perfume of the flowers, a tear fell down her cheeks cutting its way through the pink and white to the floor.

A fear gripped her. She felt she might be giving up more than she was gaining. It came to her that she was leaving all that had made her. In these surroundings she had grown, and now she was arriving at one end of her life. Further, she knew she was about to take a step into new fields; she would be thrown into a new perspective; a new condition of which she knew nothing and all these things she loved would fade from her and be lost.

It convulsed her as she felt her youth was dead.

She turned from the things about her and looked again across the fields, and thought she could see her youth being carried to its last resting place upon this beautiful day. To her the grave seemed dug, the mourners assembled. She could even hear the toll of the bells for its interment. Terribly oppressed by the idea she withdrew her hand from the curtain and fell upon her knees by the side of her bed and prayed.

Clarinda prayed for a long time, then she arose from her knees, shook the tears from her eyes and throwing a raiment of filmy stuff about her made her toilet.

Her golden hair she piled in many waves about her head. A smile broke across her lips as she looked at herself in a glass. The fear had passed from her heart and left it in a tumult of joy.

Clarinda fitted one pink foot after another pink foot into two pink slippers, then she went from the room out upon the landing to the head of the stairs.

Below her were banked flowers. Men, bearing other masses ran hither and thither, placing them as they were brought in by other men.

Her mother was already there, a tall woman

with a huge chest. She went from point to point giving orders, which were carried out carefully. Her step was slow and labored. The silence seemed to Clarinda to presage disaster.

A lean, lank, old man stepped uncertainly from one of the inner rooms, and he gazed helplessly about. His face was drawn, and his appearance betokened sorrow.

The men who worked moved from place to place with noiseless feet. The woman, torn by her emotions, continued her labors. The hall grew into a bower, while the odor from the flowers crept like a blanket over everything.

Clarinda saw the silver things collected upon the tables. Gifts of gold were interspersed. She thought them votive offerings. They sparkled and glistened in the sun which came through the many windows.

Slowly she came down the stairs and stopped in the middle of the hall, and her young, lithe body swayed with emotion.

After she had regained herself she went over to her mother and put her arms around her neck, pressing a kiss upon her cheek. They said nothing. Then she walked over to her father and helped him to a chair, and knelt down beside him.

Her father smoothed her hair with his hand as if to give her courage.

She whispered to him in a shaking voice: "This is joy!"

"It is joy," he answered simply.

"I am dying!" she exclaimed still whispering. "I am already dead! Look! Look! Father!" She raised her hand and pointed toward the men who moved about. "The men," she continued, "are decorating the rooms for the corpse. I—I—am the corpse!" and close she shrank to the side of the chair. "My youth is dead!" Clarinda's eyes filled with tears and her body shook from her emotion.

Her father raised her head and tilting her face looked into her eyes.

"No, Clarinda, you are not dead. You are not a corpse. The rooms are not decorated for your death. It is done for your re-birth. Only your youth is dead, and from it has sprung a new and wonderful thing."

Clarinda rose from her knees and put her arms frantically around his neck.

"Save me! Save me! Father!" she pleaded. "Save me! You are wonderful!"

"Listen, Clarinda, you mustn't weep. Rather you must be filled with joy, for this is a festival. You have come into something new. A great responsibility grasps you in its hand. You are

re-born. Nature calls you and you go—it is inexorable—you cannot help. You must not weep; rather you must sing and dance. You must array yourself in gold and in silk and go forth to meet the bridegroom.”

“Is there no way?” she asked with pleading in her voice.

With terrible finality, he answered “No!”

Slightly she raised her body, a look of determination spread over her face, then a trace of a smile crept back. The tears were gone.

“Ah! how I fear,” she said. “And yet, Father, I love. I wouldn’t have it changed.” Clarinda paused for an instant. “It is true, Father, I weep, but my heart is filled with joy. I am ready to go forth into the darkness. I await the coming of the bridegroom.” Clarinda stretched her hands out in front of her. “I think, Father,” she said with conviction, “that he will protect me. I am not sure.”

She sank back close to the chair and held her father’s hand close to her face.

Gently he smoothed her hair, while the love of his age went out to her in her extremity. He was torn as she was torn.

II

After quite a while Clarinda arose from beside her father, and went back up the stairs. Her mother continued to stride about the rooms, giving orders and placing things as she would have them. Clarinda went to prepare herself for the sacrifice, which she hoped in her heart would not be as terrible as she thought it would be. When she was dressed she placed a wreath of orange blossoms in her hair. Mohammedan-like her face was covered with a long diaphanous veil formed as a yashmac, except it was fastened by gold pins. Clarinda dreamed of freedom. Presently she came from her room dressed as a bride. The house became astir. Her wonderful body swayed, lithe and strong, with perfect undulations. Her youth was paramount.

Beneath her veil, her face was contorted, a deadly pallor overspread it. Her lips trembled and her hands shook slightly. She was cold.

Behind her in unison with her step came immaculate maids who bore her long train. As she advanced to come down the stairs, brides-

maids ran hither and thither, picking up wraps and huge bunches of flowers.

The front doors of the house were thrown open as she came the length of the hall, lined by lackeys in uniform. Wide stood the doors, and the sun of the day in June swept into the spaces. It was sweet with the odor of new-mown hay and it merged with the perfume of the banked-up flowers. The light as it broke in cut arabesques on the rugs.

Clarinda felt the odor of the new-mown hay and the warmth of the sun crept into her soul, burning spaces in her fear.

Beyond the open doors at the beginning of the garden, at this side of the fountain that threw its pellucid waters high into the air, stood an automobile furnished with gleaming glass sides.

Clarinda felt the quiet.

It was broken now and then by an occasional laugh, hysterical in its intensity, a giggling girl, the sob of an old servant, but these interstices seemed only to accentuate the quiet.

With effort she moved the length of the hall and passed through the open doors. She entered the automobile which was to carry her to the church and a new life. Clarinda peered through the glass sides and watched the things she knew so well swept by her.

As the car started off, she heard the thundering tones of the bells of the church.

The car finished its journey and stopped suddenly at the church. Some one opened the door and helped her alight. Clustered about on the pavement stood evil, curious people. They gaped with envious eyes upon the girl. Some in their envy spat upon the stones as if to give vent to their wrath. Maliciously they grinned or cursed, cruel, bitter jealousy filled their souls. They whispered and commented upon her beauty and the beauty of her gown.

Clarinda did not know they asked why. Nor that their hands were stretched out in an agony to destroy. She did not know they hated her and the things she represented. Nor did she know they thought it unfair that they should be without and she should have all. These people shivered in the heat of the day. None of them smiled. Clarinda went by them without looking. She did not see their faces, nor did she feel their comments upon her and her gown.

The church swallowed her up. It was all dark. Heavy perfume hung in the air and the gloom was smitten and torn by lights from tall candles upon the high altar. Here and there the sun sent a ray through the stained-glass windows as if to try to dispel the dark. At a distance that seemed miles to Clarinda

was the high altar, covered with flowers and decorated with the insignia of the church.

As she looked down the aisle, she saw standing at the end of the chancel, a priest in garments of white and of gold. He was looking steadily towards her as she approached, and at times read from his rubric. A choir of voices in the stalls sang and the music reverberated through the church.

At the steps to the chancel, she saw another man, who was very tall; behind him stood another clothed in black as the first, like bearers at a funeral. As she stopped the bridesmaids collected in certain fixed lines about her, making bright spots in the gloom. They seemed happy, and as envious as the poor who stood at the door and cursed her in the sunlight. The priest raised his hand and prayed that an infinite God might bless this pair. He read with deep intonations.

He was old and grey, his body was bent with the weight of his years. Many had come to him in their youth. Over thousands he had intoned the same prayers and raised his hand in blessing. He had seen these thousands turn and walk away to dangers they knew nothing of, with hope in their hearts and love in their souls.

Even so, Clarinda walked to dangers she knew

nothing of, as thousands had before her, with hope in her heart and infinite love in her soul. As she turned from the priest, she pushed the veil back from her face and gently placed her hand upon the arm of the man—a smile was on her lips. Calmly she walked towards the door of the church, through the searching eyes of the host.

The car bore them swiftly away from the mob and their curses. Clarinda crept close to the man at her side, and even though she smiled a tear fell down her face. Clarinda trembled and shook as she tucked herself closer and closer to his side. The man put his arm around her, drawing her lovely body to him, and wiping away the tears as they fell.

“It is wonderful,” she said tremulously. The man laughed. “I am yours,” she added.

“Mine!” he replied.

“Everything that I was before is done. I am someone else. There is no more the old Clarinda. Don’t you think it is wonderful? Think of it, a few words, a motion of the hand, a prayer intoned by an old man and everything that one has been is dead.”

“Yes, it is wonderful, Clarinda. You are mine,” the man replied, and added as an afterthought, “until death do us part, for richer or for poorer; in sickness and in health.”

Clarinda withdrew herself from his arms and sat straight up in the car. She looked him steadily in the face.

“Let no man put asunder what God hath joined together,” she said with deep feeling.

“Those are the words,” he answered.

Through the streets, over the stones, around the corners, through the unheeding many who were swept by their own necessities, the car rushed as if it wished to deliver itself as quickly as possible of the freight it carried.

The keeper of the lodge, at the beginning of the garden stood waiting at the gate. As they passed he bowed low to the ground. His face was covered with a sinister smile. His hat touched the immaculate driveway, as it had done when they went out.

They came to the house. The bridesmaids arrived in various cars and collected about her. Her old father took her kindly in his arms. Her mother pressed a kiss upon her face. The music from the organ at the end of the hall played loudly and a childish voice sang alone, “O Perfect Love.”

Clarinda took her stand in the middle of a long line of people. Other people came in hordes, some shook her by the hand and all mumbled platitudes. Others kissed her and made remarks even as platitudinous. To each

she gave a smile and tried in her heart to believe this was a day of joy. The beginning of a new life of unlimited possibilities. The future she hoped was golden in its promise.

The man to whom she had been married stood close by her side; at times, he sought her hand and pressed it violently. Visions of a great happiness floated harmoniously through his mind. He was strong, virile, oppressive in his strength. His face was covered with smiles. He made answer to all the thoughtless congratulations. He stood beside his new-made mother-in-law. Her chest was more prominent than ever. It rose and fell as the heaving of the sea. He bent and kissed her.

The father, the old man, twisted with age and the struggle he had made with the world, who by his fight had made all these things possible, took those who came by the hand and answered as best he could. Down in his heart he was oppressed with anxiety. The thing filled him with fear.

After a long time the line broke and the bridesmaids scattered. They chattered and laughed, each one in her heart hoping that out of this day, might come her chance to follow in the footsteps of Clarinda.

When all the company had assembled and they had seethed about and made their compli-

ments, the doors were thrown open that led to the dining rooms, and the line in which Clarinda had stood for so long a time broke. The laden tables revealed themselves, burdened with mounds of food, in the center of one of them a huge cake, and beside it a long, glistening knife.

The men turned with a sigh of relief from the lights of the day, the girl and the music, their minds going to their stomachs. Everything was forgotten in the mad rush for the food. Old women growled and the young like predatory beasts crowded and secured the best for themselves.

Wines flowed with a lavish hand. Men drank as if it were the last drink of their lives. The smoke from innumerable cigarettes wreathed fantastic festoons over the people. In a short while the men and the women moved with uncertain steps over the polished floors, surfeited with the wines.

Clarinda's mind was in a whirl. She saw all these things, and sensed none of them. After a great while she slipped from the crowd and wandered with faltering steps from one great room of the house to another. Her father followed her stealthily as if he feared she might like some ethereal thing float into space.

She made her way from room to room, and

as she went she stretched out her hand and stroked each object as if she loved it.

Room after room she visited, up all the staircases she went, slowly and surely, until she came to the top of the house. Stopping at an oriel window she laid her hand on the frame, and bending her head leaned it against her arm. Below and beyond she saw the garden stretched like a great panorama. The places she loved were there below her, where she had played as a child. She followed with her eyes the well-beloved paths; every flower, every bush she could identify; they seemed to carry a special significance to her at the moment. Across the lake ambient in its blue she saw the jutting ledges and barren rocks where she had sat so many days and planned her life—what it should be; and she found now it was not to be.

She knew her chimera was shattered. Everything she had planned was gone from her. All was changed. Clarinda felt the wrench from her old life and the cast into the new. An anguish greater than she had ever felt before came over her, and with a saddened spirit she turned from the window, from the garden, the paths and her childhood. As she turned she met the eyes of her father, who stood just below her in the doorway to the room.

The old man trembled and was uncertain, his

mind was torn with conflicting emotions. He felt with the going of Clarinda it was the end, the disrupting of the one thing upon which he had built all his later life. Yet, he knew in his heart, it was but a natural sequence. He had built his temple around this slip of a girl. All the dreams of his life had been centered upon this one thing. He had so wished she would always be with him, and that she should gather his many years together, place them in his old dead hands and fold the curtain, when he should at last be placed where moth and rust do not corrupt nor thieves break through and steal.

No one knew with more certainty than he, that all things were futile and ephemeral, but a passing foment. As he stood below at the door and looked up at her with her luxuriant life, he knew he would soon go,—and in a short while she too would pass. Out of nature would come obliteration, and with this obliteration all things he had built crumbled into dust. Even the tiny traces he had made upon the shifting sands of time would be blotted out. His fortunes, his house built of iron and granite, in a few short strokes of the clock would return to their primordial condition; this, even, before the grass should grow green above him.

Clarinda moved quickly over to him and

clutched his hand, as if she felt the thoughts that were going through his mind. The old man shook with fear. He feared death, for it was an obsession with him. The thought of his last hours filled him with an ineffable sorrow, and drove the sweat out upon his forehead. And he knew death was there, he felt it in his quaking limbs and in his unsteady gait. He felt at times as if he dwelt with the dead.

At night when he laid himself down to rest, after the multitudinous labors of his day, as he closed his eyes, he would see floating before him all those whom he had known and with whom he had lived and worked and who had died. He counted them as they passed before him. A cold perspiration as he counted them enveloped him while they beckoned to him to follow, with their denuded fingers, and laughed at his futility.

He shivered now and clasped Clarinda's hand so firmly that she winced with pain. With an effort he gathered himself together. Clarinda stretched her arms out to him and put them gently around his neck, as if to protect him from his fears.

"Father!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, my child," he said tremulously.

They turned and went slowly hand in hand down through the halls, from place to place,

from room to room, on down to the place of the food.

Together they stood for a few moments at the bottom of the staircase and looked at the milling crowd. They, even, marked the steps of those who had fed and drunk too eagerly, as they weaved and staggered from one part of the hall to the other.

They listened to the laughter emphasized by the wines. The crowd milled about. The young danced to the music. The old sat immovable in the chairs, breathing heavily like constrictors. They smiled, these overfed, and whispered among themselves; they criticised, and in their meager hearts their filled stomachs gave charity.

Gradually the hands of the clock, at the head of the stairs, moved towards the hour of departure. Unheeding time went on its inexorable way—irrepressible, grinding, persistent. It ground these minions with malicious certitude. It grinned at the futility of the people, the futility of the father, of the groom, the bridesmaids, the flowers, and the players of the music behind the palms.

It knew, this inexorable time, that the flowers massed upon the tables and hung in festoons from every point of vantage, the tables, the chairs, even the lights, it would smother in its

unending advance. The people who laughed, who drank the wines and smoothed each other with unmeaning unction, it would in its own good process take back and bury in itself.

Clarinda knew nothing of time, and smiled at its progress. She smiled because she had never thought. Life to her was but opening up, and all of it was to be.

The man to whom she had been married came to her, and together they walked to the table that held the huge cake. Her heart turned from the things about her and went to him who cut the cake as if it were the Gordian knot. He cut this thing with the same strength he would cut his way to fame. Pride expanded her heart as she looked at him. Her father faded from her sight, and in his place came a new thing, a bigger thing, that resolved itself into youth, hope and ambition. She saw her mother float from place to place, and she too faded into the things that had been, and she had no place in the new condition.

Out of the complacency of her youth she looked at her mother's tired face. Incompletely she saw her move from place to place. For some reason her spirit revolted against her as if she had done her an irreparable wrong, in bringing her into the world.

Clarinda left the crowd and went up the

stairs by herself to dress for her departure. The man, the groom, youth to her youth, waited at the foot of the stairs, and talked rapidly with another man who twitted him. They laughed occasionally, and he smoked, this bridegroom, viciously, drawing the smoke from his cigarette deep down into his lungs, but the tobacco quieted him, and lent him assurance.

As he waited, he thought that from now on in the distant future all things should be his, the world, and success lay in the hollow of his hand. He would command. Life was no mystery, no uncertainty. It was plain and the hard road would be marched with ease.

For months before this wedding, in the still watches of the night, he had dreamed of the house he would build, and the things he would accumulate. He built this house, brick upon brick, just as he had dreamed, and he placed within its walls each piece of furniture as he would have it. In the aurora of it he placed Clarinda, for there was no futility rearing its head in front of him.

For a long time he stood with the other man at the foot of the staircase, waiting patiently, and presently from above came a sound, then he turned his eyes and above him stood Clarinda in all her lovely fragrance. Clarinda was ready, ready to go forth to give herself to

him, and to take up life as it would come. A fearlessness, complete, enveloped her.

A smile covered her face as she saw him below. Then she placed one tiny foot in front of another tiny foot, and her movement was slow as if in accordance with the music that played in the hall. The man's heart beat in unison with her step, and a smile of pride covered his face. The crowd stood back, then, as she stopped for a moment, a faint murmur arose, the voices gradually becoming louder, until the air was rent with a roar of approval.

Out into the sunlight they went—the man and the maid, and at the beginning of the garden they entered the car. The bridesmaids threw after them, as they left, old shoes and broken slippers as if they hoped to give a happy augury to their future.

Then the two, lost in the car, looked out of the windows, and they saw the garden fade out of sight. The keeper of the lodge like some old gnome bowed low to the driveway, this time as if an evil spirit possessed him. He seemed to laugh at their youth and their hopes.

The old keeper knew what futility was, for, in his youth he had taken hope in his heart and love in his soul. He, as they, had started down the roseate path, and it had looked to him as it did to them now, as to all the others who had

driven through these gates and had come after him with hopes in their hearts and love in their souls. They, as he, had swept up the ashes of their lives upon the hearths of their homes. And the winds of adversity had come and driven them whirling into space. Out of it all they had gathered nothing, nothing remained, except bitterness, age and the certainty of death.

Clarinda saw nothing of this. In her ears the car sang. The power under the hood sang, and the man who drove sang, even the birds flying in the soft sunlight sang madrigals, and the great beams of the sun, as they cut the branches of the trees, seemed to be doing so out of pure love for her and her joy. The man beside her told her of his love—of the thought in him that at last he had arrived at the peak of his life. He told her that she was the one thing that went to complete his happiness. Clarinda trembled with joy and nestled closer and closer to him. Nothing marred the pleasure she felt. She dwelt upon his words he uttered and gloried in the softness of his voice. Clarinda held fast to the things he said and let them sink into her heart.

Mile after mile went by. They talked but little, but he told her again and again of his

love, and from time to time he took her gently in his arms and kissed her.

Clarinda forgot everything, except the moment.

Late in the night they came to the front of a huge house, lit from cellar to garret. In front, collected upon the porch, there moved about many servants. The heavy doors were open and the lights from within cut the night as with a two-edged sword. The car stopped. Clarinda got out slowly. They walked hand in hand into the place. Clarinda gave no thought to anything.

They were served and ate a light repast. The clock in the hall struck twelve, the butler yawned and the other servants stood about and let their faces fall into a curious repose. The man arose from his seat. Clarinda passed out of the room. In her dressing-room there was a book, and it was open and as she read the open page a flush came over her face.

III

In a short while the urge came, and they wished to leave the great house with its lights, its vast rooms, its servants and its gorgeously costumed lackeys. No volition of their own forced them out, but they were compelled to go forth and select the soil in which they should place the foundations, and upon these foundations, build their own lives. As the spirit moved they went from time to time arm in arm, and roamed from one street to another, and it gave them happiness. Together they discussed each department into which they went, its advantages and disadvantages, and with unconcealed joy, they haggled with persons who dealt in these things.

When it became bruited abroad that they were in search of an apartment, agents appeared upon the scene and told them in specious exaggeration, how each place that each offered was superior to that offered by any other agent. The superlative rested in their offerings.

Clarinda and her husband marched from one tiny place to another tiny place, that had tiny

rooms with even smaller additions called kitchenettes.

Weeks were spent in this occupation, until eventually, after many times referring back to the judgment of her father and long consultations with her mother, they found a place upon a quiet street. It seemed to them suitable soil in which they could sink their tentacles. They knew that within these four walls they would find happiness, for both of them thought that happiness was a matter of location.

The man as he went with Clarinda listened to her discussions, her objections or her periods of admiration with enthusiasm, and agreed that however small the place might be it made no difference as its very smallness precluded the possibility of their being far from each other. For many nights, before they fled from the big house of their honeymoon, they sat late and discussed the pleasure it would give them, when he should come home after the grind of the day's work and he and she would make plans for their betterment.

As he and Clarinda talked over these matters, he would rise from his seat beside her and pace the floor in great agitation. Up and down the big room, from one end to the other he paced, and he would draw for her pictures of what they should have, of each piece of furni-

ture and described of what sort it should be, and it gave him pleasure to suggest to her how each piece should be placed and to each suggestion, Clarinda agreed eagerly.

“We shall sit upon the divan in the evenings,” he said, “and you will sit close to me—ever so close. Naturally, we shall have a divan. We could not do without a thing of that sort—a big cushy one. I want it to eat up the room. We’ll place it directly in front of the fireplace. Don’t you think it will be fine in the winter evenings with the fire going lazily up the chimney? Just you and I there together with the big world shut out.”

“And behind the divan, we shall have a tall lamp,” she broke in. “What do you think of a pink shade?”

“Just finishes the picture as I have it in mind. By all means a pink shade,” he replied enthusiastically.

“I do so like clocks. Shall we have a clock? You see I could watch the clock, and then I should know when you were coming and maybe it would not be so hard to wait,” said Clarinda with a plaintive tone in her voice, as if she already felt the sorrow of his absence.

“Of course we shall have to have a clock—a chime clock. One of the kind that strikes differ-

ent tones for each quarter of an hour. You know the kind I mean," he assented quickly.

And so they built their castle and fitted it with the things they thought they would love, and they did not know it was all foolish and futile.

They moved into the spot they had selected, and adapted and placed the furniture they had chosen. The divan, for it was upon the divan all their future lives were to be planned, was in the room, and it took up a lot of space just as they thought it would. Behind the divan they placed a tall lamp with a pink shade that sent an even glow over them and threw no shadows, and Clarinda liked the dim light. When the man had gone in the mornings to his place of business, she would cuddle herself on the divan and her mind gloated upon the things about her, and her happiness was complete.

Then her friends came—the bridesmaids, and the others, those who had stood about and been fed, and who drank the wine to excess and had gone unsteadily over the polished floors; they sat upon the divan, and Clarinda thought they desecrated it; they rushed from one tiny room to the other and peered with malicious eyes into the kitchenette; and they smiled among themselves at the tininess of the place, and gave their unerring judgment on its possi-

bilities. Clarinda's mother soon came, and she turned the things about and bemoaned with her husband the meagerness of the setting and of the furnishings.

Clarinda watched her mother move about the place as she put things as she would have them, and when she was gone Clarinda moved them back again to their original positions. The man laughed and spoke jestingly of her mother's taste. In her heart her mother pitied her. But the old man was proud of Clarinda and presaged for her all the things he so desired she should have. He did not forget the doleful street, the poorness of the surroundings, and the flimsiness of his first home. His start he remembered was so much poorer than Clarinda's. Yet he could not forget the pride and the pleasure he had derived from it, and his heart beat with infinite joy then, as Clarinda's beat now.

Now the round of life was upon them. The man and the maid fell into the swing. The nest was finished, its sides were put together with infinite care. Each twig was intertwined with every other twig, in order that it might be strong and withstand the assaults of wind and weather. The man looked on with pride, and Clarinda was filled with unbounded faith.

Never before had she experienced such pleas-

ure, even in the luxury of her father's house, as when she sat in the mornings at her own table with her husband, and he at the lower end while the trim little maid brought their breakfast.

Clarinda loved the silver as it stood in front of her, and derived a sensation of sweetness from her surroundings, as she asked whether he would have sugar in his coffee. She knew perfectly what he liked, but there was something wonderful to her to ask each morning with the same anxiety. It pleased her to pour each morning, each cup of coffee, but she did so with perturbation. Always she asked whether it was just right, and always he answered it could not be more perfect. Her heart was filled with apprehension, for it was possible she might make a mistake—it might not be just right.

Each morning at a precise time, the man left the house, and each morning he kissed her good-bye and held her close to his heart. Each morning she went to the door and watched him go down the stairs, then she rushed to the window to watch him wave his hand to her before he disappeared around the corner, and she smiled and was happy.

Then one day in June, just as her wedding had taken place upon a day in June, the day broke as usual, and the sun came up. The early

morning breezes fluttered the trees. The usual breakfast had been partaken of. Clarinda had asked the same questions and had received the same replies. The trim little maid had done her duty. Life seemed as happy and as justifiable as ever.

The man arose from his seat and rushed from the room. Clarinda stood upon this memorable morning in the doorway as he went away. She looked after him as he went rapidly down the stairs, and slowly she closed the door behind her.

Clarinda felt the negation of the man's service. She craved the kiss he had given her each morning. She did not sing when she closed the door, nor did she rush to the window and wait for him to pass the corner. From that moment a wound had been made in her heart and the blood dripped from the gash.

The man did not fail to kiss his wife through malice. Kisses had simply grown stale in his mouth, and now seemed to him a useless observance.

He thought of these things as he went along, and the more he turned them over in his mind, the more convinced he became he had made a mistake. The thought of these things remained with him all the morning, and for some unexplained reason he did not work as well. He

lacked interest and the work dragged more than ordinarily. Still he argued within himself as if to justify his position, that kissing was a foolish observance and it ought to be laid aside.

The day dragged for him, and the clocks in the various steeples struck the hours with the same indifference as they did every day. The crowds on the pavements went by as on every other day, with the same intent upon their own difficulties.

Clarinda, left alone in the tiny flat, knew something was wrong. Her day was different. Her heart was wrong, and tears collected on her face many times during the hours that went by. And she knew—why.

The trim little maid came and touched her upon the shoulder as she sat cuddled in a corner of the divan. She was a Frenchwoman, with a white frill about her head. A smile of pity was on her lips, as she kindly touched Clarinda, and her hand was as light as the breeze without, as Clarinda moved and looked up into her face.

“It is the little things in life, Madame, that count,” she said. Clarinda shook her head in assent.

“I am miserable,” Clarinda replied.

Clarinda pushed back her golden hair from her forehead, wiped the tears from her face, and arose from the divan. The maid left as she

arose, and went about her duties. She dusted with care and with careful hand replaced the flowers in the vases with fresh ones.

Clarinda stood for a second in the middle of the room and then walked slowly over to the window and looked pensively down upon the street. She wondered if, in all her existence the maid had only dusted and swept, if in all her existence she had ever worked for anyone who was as unhappy as she was.

All during the day Clarinda did not smile, but wandered aimlessly from one part of the apartment to the other, and she took no interest in the maid nor in the fixing of things for the home-coming of the man. But this day went like all the others—it glided by with a total indifference to her or her unfortunate position.

Six o'clock came. The day's work for many was over. As the clock on the mantel chimed out the hour, the lower entrance door to the house opened and then shut with a bang, and the man came bounding up the stairs with the same haste he had always come. He threw the apartment door open and launched his body into the room. His face was covered with smiles. He was just as wonderful, just as strong as when he had gone from her in the morning. Clarinda wondered that this could be so.

Clarinda looked at him and sighed. Her heart beat painfully, and her breath came in deep short gasps. No, he did not kiss her. As he stopped in the middle of the room and looked about him she went over to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder. He still smiled.

“You forgot something this morning,” she said slowly as she looked up into his face.

A quizzical expression went over him. He did not appreciate her sorrow.

“What?” he asked after quite a while.

“You don’t know?” she asked with astonishment.

“No,” he replied, shaking his head. “Was it my overshoes or my coat?” The man jested with her, which added to the pain she had suffered during the day.

“The maid knows—Peter.”

“The maid knows a great deal,” he answered.

“You don’t know? Oh, Peter! Peter!” she exclaimed, her voice full of tragedy. “You have forgotten something even now.”

Peter pressed his hand against his forehead as if in deep thought, and he let a light come into his eyes. He still jested with her. Of course he knew. He took her slim fingers in his hand and led her over to the divan.

“I know, I know,” he said, as if a great

light had broken in upon him. "What a foolish child you are."

He took her gently in his arms and pressed his lips to hers. Clarinda smiled and tucked herself close in his arms.

"You won't forget again, Peter?" she asked.

"No," he replied with a shake of his head.

IV

Notwithstanding Peter took her in his arms and soothed her perturbation and made life bloom once more with almost the same brightness it had, the air was permeated with a spirit of uncertainty. The effect was impalpable, for there existed in Clarinda's mind a subconscious fear that something had crept into her love which was foreign—and ate interstices in the whole.

This permeation of her love by some foreign thing was evident to her father one evening when he dropped in and found Peter absent. Peter explained to Clarinda with care the necessity of his going, and tried to convince her that it was vital for him to keep an engagement. It was so vital, he contended, that it would brook no interference, not even the interference of the thing which was the sole ambition of his life—her happiness. This engagement was of such importance that it would not allow him to sink down upon the divan and take her in his arms and tell her of the things he had accomplished during the day. Peter kissed her as he went out, but Clarinda was upset.

As the old man came through the door, the

light was dim, and only the single burner in the tall lamp shed its uncertain rays about the place. He took off his top-coat and placed his cane in a corner. Clarinda kissed him and helpfully settled him in the spot which was Peter's.

Her father watched her during these preparations, and he felt from some reason that the atmosphere was filled with uncertainty. Feeling this he gathered himself together and pondered upon the various ways of approach by which he might help Clarinda without her suspecting. He knew. It was indicated to him by her movements.

The care with which she fixed things for his comfort were an indication and he decided to abide his time.

Presently Clarinda sat herself down beside him and leaned her head against his shoulder. He put his arm around her and drew her close to him. Clarinda sighed with satisfaction. They talked. Her father answered her various questions. It was a desultory conversation, as if both were sparring for an opening. Presently they sank into silence.

Many days had passed since Peter, on that memorable morning, had gone out of the house and had not kissed her, nor held her in his arms, nor turned at the corner and waved his hand to her. Since then he had forgotten repeatedly,

and each time he went from her it left a bitter feeling in her heart. Clarinda lived on love, so when it was denied her she felt as if something vital had been taken out of her life.

Since they had been married, one winter had come and gone, and another was upon them. The snow had fallen, and the leaves had gone from the trees. The people without had gone by unmindful, cold, impersonal—and did not feel the tragedy Clarinda was carrying in her heart. They rushed by muffled to their chins. The days were shorter, and the nights settled down upon her earlier. They gave Clarinda a longer time to think of her sorrow, and to find out how far she had advanced.

On this winter night, in front of Clarinda and her father on the tiny hearth, there burnt a tiny fire, that gave a tiny blaze; and it curled itself up the chimney and lost itself in the orifice. Clarinda settled herself by her father's side, and gazed intently into the fire. She pressed his hand tightly in hers, and buried her head securely on his shoulder. As she looked into the fire, her eyes widened and her cheeks became flushed with the heat.

“All things are futile, aren't they, father?” she asked slowly. Then she lapsed into silence as if to think of a proper word or as if a certain delicacy restrained her.

Her father believed that she was about to make a confession, and did not answer.

After a while, she added: "Do people live forever? Do you love mother now as when you first loved her?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I have a wonderful reason—tell me?" she demanded.

A curious expression came over his face, half serious, half amused. Carefully taking his hand from hers and lifting her golden head from his shoulder, he arose from the divan.

The pillow she had placed behind his head slipped noiselessly to the floor, and walking a few steps, he turned his back to the fireplace and took his stand in the middle of the rug.

Judicially he placed his hands behind his back and looked down upon her.

"You will learn," he answered cryptically.

"What do you mean?" she asked in a puzzled tone.

"There is wisdom, Clarinda, that comes to the old. This wisdom is sometimes uncanny in its analytical possibilities."

"You don't reply to my questions," she said as she turned the full light of her eyes upon him. "Do you still love mother as when you began?"

“You asked me that before, and I told you,” he answered slowly. Then as an afterthought added, “What is the trouble?”

“I have no trouble,” she rejoined hastily. Then she went on as if she had decided to bare her soul to him.

“I will tell you, try to follow me.”

“All right, go ahead with your tragedy,” he replied banteringly.

“Do not laugh—be serious! You don’t know how vital this thing is to me.”

Clarinda moved her feet in a shuffling manner. “I believe,” she went on seriously, “that the flat is too small. It doesn’t give sufficient leverage. We live too much upon each other. It is true I love—I love everything in it. From the maid to the kitchenette. I have been so happy in it. Of course, for me it is not too small. I like it for that very reason. You can’t imagine how delightful it has been for me to sit here with no one but Peter, with not a sound from the outside—just Peter and I alone. Don’t you think love is queer? I mean queer in its effects on different kinds of people?”

As she spoke her father did not interrupt her, but his eyes followed every expression of her face.

“Peter and I,” she went on, “have lived here more than a year.” A combative tone came into

her voice. "Peter is doing well. But then that is Peter. Of course, Peter is doing well. How could he do otherwise? You don't know Peter, Father, as I know him. Peter is wonderful."

"Then you are pleased with Peter?" her father said with a smile.

Clarinda did not answer his question. It struck her mind as frivolous. She continued as if no interruption had taken place. "Do you know, Father, Peter is cruel? I've been very happy here. A great change has come about I find, and many many times I've sat here in this corner and tried to analyze the reason for the change. I wonder whether it is my fault or whether it is just the ordinary course of human feeling. I ask myself whether I have failed, or has he failed? Is love only a satisfaction of a certain kind of natural law or is it a thing that can be sustained, I mean carried on forever? I wonder to myself whether there is really such a thing as love, and if not, what is it that produces such wonderful sensations? If after all it is only a myth. Why should people be sorry, or glad, or pleased at the approach of any one person? Why should I not be as happy, if love does not exist, with John Jones or John Smith or any other person? Anyway there is a great change. Peter has changed, I have changed. Everything is different. I can't understand."

Her father still smiled. He did not grasp how deeply she felt, nor could he understand precisely the conclusion she was drawing. He thought her a trifle incoherent. He was still satisfied, however, if she were given time he would find out. He remained silent and kept his eyes fastened upon her.

“Listen, Father! Follow me with care. It is very difficult for me to explain exactly.” Clarinda wept and bent over in her grief, then murmured with intensity. “Can’t you understand? Can’t you understand?”

Her father saw her body shaken with emotion and the tears steal between her fingers. He was terribly oppressed.

He advanced a few steps and laid his hand gently upon her head, his touch was sympathetic. She looked up at him with her tear-stained face, and hope entered her heart.

“Poor little Clarinda,” he began with tenderness in his voice. “I know your difficulty. Let’s talk it over.” He sat down in the corner of the divan by her side.

Clarinda fixed the stool again under his feet and replaced the pillow under his head, then she tucked herself into the bend of his arm and Clarinda’s golden head lay in comfort on his shoulder, a feeling of bliss and security in her heart. She waited for him to speak.

“Now let’s see if I can analyze this terrible condition. You would be surprised how observant I am,” he began. “You think Peter doesn’t love you as he did. You, in your silly mind have let your imagination get the better of you. This is probably what happened: Peter in the press of his duties has neglected you, or you think he has, which is about the same thing in the end. This neglect was not in itself a great matter nor of much importance, but was probably in some little attention he gave you.”

Clarinda listened intently.

“Let’s say for example, that he broke some custom that he had built up—a custom that had come to be part of your life, and that you looked forward to as much as you do, for instance, to your fruit in the morning. You have deduced from this infraction that he doesn’t love you as in the beginning.”

Clarinda opened her eyes in astonishment. He was placing before her clearly, exactly what she had wanted to tell, but could not. With a few words he arrived at the bottom of her trouble. Clarinda shook her head and tucked herself closer to his side.

“How wonderful you are, Father,” she whispered. “How exactly you tell me what I wanted to explain.”

“Clarinda,” he went on, “you probably don’t

know that as a rule men love intensely. Their love is a curious stable condition of mind. It consumes them. It becomes part of their fibre. You'll find out later in life, when you've had greater experience, that men are monagamous, with polygamous inclinations. That statement is a bit involved. More than likely you don't get what I mean quite clearly. Of course, Clarinda, I am speaking about ordinary men, the right-thinking and the right-doing sort." He stopped for an instant as if deliberating, and finally went on:

"Still, Clarinda, even with the sort I have in mind, they are curious, because they are human. They build the foundations of their lives with no uncertainty. After it is done, they arrive at the idea that what they have built is stable. They forget. Men, my dear child, are essentially constructionists. It doesn't follow because they are complacent that they love any the less. It might be advanced really that they love with fiercer intensity. The reason for this is that men are removed only a slight degree from the animal. It is true they are covered with a slight veneer which is called civilization. Just like animals, anything that comes into their lives becomes part of them. As I have indicated, love gets into their blood, bone and sinew. Peter loves you just the same. Dis-

abuse your mind of this idea that he doesn't love you. It is all foolishness. All your fears are founded on sand. This condition is not your fault. It is the natural course that love always follows and nearly all men arrive at the same end."

Clarinda sat very still and listened intently. In her heart as she had always done she felt her father was the greatest being in the world. Even at times greater than Peter. This admission cost her much, but for years he had been her bulwark. Upon his judgment her life had been founded. During her young days she had looked upon him as an oracle. And now in this crisis, after he had spoken she was sure he was just as she thought.

"Your situation is clear to me," he continued. "Suppose I draw you a picture of your position." He paused for a moment. "I have in mind what occurred. Let us suppose for example, that every morning when Peter left you before he went out of the door he kissed you. You lived on that kiss until he came back in the evening. It might be before he went away he held you for an instant in his arms and patted your lovely head. And then after he had gone and had gotten out on the street, you ran to the window and waved your hand to him as he went around the corner. You treasured that

final wave. Peter is only a man. Peter is not a bad sort. Now, how is that for the first part of my picture?"

"Father! Father!" she exclaimed. "How wonderful you are."

"Let's go further with our picture," he began again. "Now what did you do? Being inexpressibly foolish, on that very first day this terrible thing happened here is what I see. In this picture you are a stricken thing. Slowly you go back into the room, with the weight of the world upon you. The house is all drab. You don't rush to the window. Oh, no, not you, instead you weep and the tears roll down your face. You feel right then as if all the world has fallen apart, and there is only a great void.

"In your misery you felt, for this was real to you, sick at heart. You threw yourself down upon the divan and sank into a terrible condition. This lasted throughout the day, until Peter came home. When he saw you, so sad and dreary and your face be-streaked with tears, he took you in his arms—and right then—the sun came back. Your heart beat with joy. How's that, Clarinda?"

"But why should it happen?" Clarinda burst forth. "Why should Peter change? I am just the same. I am just as young. Just as beautiful. Peter always says I am beautiful.

My physical self is just the same. I don't believe I am any the less attractive or less appealing to his man's side. Peter forgets. He forgets often. Why should he feel that he can go out and leave me as he does? Why should he not kiss me every morning? I don't forget."

"All that is true, Clarinda," her father went on. "The reason for its happening, I have explained. But there is something else. It is a curious psychological fact. Women are different from men, for the reason that nature has so provided. I can't answer this question. It would take too long, and even if I did, you might not understand the fine distinction I would wish to draw. There are so many shades, so many complexes, so many difficulties in the way of an understandable explanation. The question is too deep for me to discuss. You don't have a proper grasp of the human factor as it is applied to me. The shadows, Clarinda, upon your life are all imaginary. They don't exist really."

The conversation died, and Clarinda sat with her father in complete silence. She endeavored to make him say more, but he would not. He looked into the fire and watched the flame go up the chimney. The clock on the mantel struck the hours musically, and the wind without blew with an angry insistence. But Clarinda was

at peace. Her head was clear and she saw distinctly into the future. The seconds of time went into minutes and the minutes grew into hours. The persistent ticking of the clock was at last broken by the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps, as if they bore someone in great haste. Then the door opened and Peter bounded into the room and filled it completely.

"It is late," said Peter breathlessly. "But I've a good excuse. I've done well tonight and it is all for you, Clarinda."

Clarinda arose quickly from the divan, and Peter took her gently in his arms. Her father winked at her knowingly and smiled.

"What have you done, Peter?" she asked, as she struggled to release herself from him.

"Wait until I get my breath," he replied as he pushed her gently back upon the divan. He sat down between them.

Carefully he arranged himself, stretching his long legs comfortably out in front of him; then he folded his arms complacently over his chest.

"Tell us, Peter?" Clarinda asked again, as she drew herself close to him. "Isn't it nice?" she added. "Just we three together. Father, you, and I?"

Her father laughed and Peter put his arm around her.

“You’re a nice little person, Clarinda,” he said.

“But think, Peter, why shouldn’t I be happy? What more could I want?”

“That brings me to exactly what I wanted to tell you. What more could you want? I can think of lots of things. For example—a larger place. It might be the house on the Park Way. A car you could drive. A larger divan, with a bigger lamp behind it. Probably new clothes—a fur coat. Maybe a husband who would really accomplish something.” Peter stopped and contracted his brows. “Then further you might have a new father who would think more of you, one who might be more proud of you. I admit that is drawing a long bow; but he might be found.”

“Peter, you are foolish,” she answered with wonderful pleasure in her voice. She loved to hear Peter talk, even if she thought what he said was foolish. “I want nothing. I was just telling father how pleased I was.”

“You were also telling me how unhappy you were,” her father interjected.

Clarinda sprang from the divan and stood directly in front of her father. “You know that isn’t true. I never said I was anything but happy. Father, I don’t see how you can imagine such things. Tell Peter it isn’t so.”

“All right, all right!” her father answered. “Oh, woman! Oh, woman! Now listen, you two. Since I have made such a grievous mistake, let’s speculate. Listen to the oracle: you, Peter, and you, Clarinda. I have a plan, which I think would do you both good. Ahem!” he cleared his throat, “I find after due consideration of your situation, that your lives are too prosaic. Too much the same thing. Suppose you had a plot, some deep and sinister thing. I admit that the average persons don’t have plots in their lives, but that does not matter, some few do, and why not you? You two should have some deep compelling motive, and there should be some other factor that would probably lead to some horrible situation, a murder, or a great theft, or a dual existence, something that would lead to a tragedy, mixed with blood and gore.”

“Horrible!” exclaimed Clarinda, and Peter shook his head in disagreement.

“But think of the interest you would have!” he added. “Peter could shoot you, or you could shoot Peter. You would have your picture in the papers, with splashing headlines. Instead of leading normal lives you would then undergo a great change, and when you died, people would remember you long enough to go to your funerals.”

“The subject is changed. If you can’t be more cheerful you may go home,” broke in Clarinda.

“I agree with Clarinda,” put in Peter.

“Now, father, you are properly squelched. Let Peter tell us what he did today. That’s more interesting than plots, murders and thefts. I don’t care how prosaic my life is so long as I have you two to take care of me. What did you do, Peter?”

“First of all, I bought the house on the Park Way,” he began. “I had the deed made out in the name of Mrs. Clarinda Thorbald. Second, I had put in the garage a nice little car. The license is made out in the name of Mrs. Clarinda Thorbald. Third, I had hung in one of the closets the coat Mrs. Clarinda Thorbald admired so much the other day. Fourth, I have had placed in the house—let’s see?” Peter told off on his fingers. “A housekeeper of the pickled kind, who has never smiled; this quality has been guaranteed by her last employers. A butler of austere mien, a door man, a first-floor maid, a chef, a chauffeur, a hall boy, two cooks—these are in addition to the chef. Then there is a gardener, a furnace man—Lord! I think it is an army. And that’s not all—” Peter stopped for a moment. “Upstairs off the main hall I have had furnished a room pre-

cisely like this one. In it is a very tall lamp, with a pink shade. A divan like this one that we are sitting on. But the greatest of all and the thing that was the most difficult to get—I found for her a father—just the kind I suggested.”

“Peter!—Peter!” Clarinda exclaimed.

“Oh, there is something else. Another thing that I found. You might imagine I had difficulty in finding a new father for you, but that was not a circumstance to this thing I accomplished. I spent days in the search. I wandered from one end of the town to the other. I hunted with infinite care. At times I became completely discouraged and almost gave up in despair; but persistency is not a jewel, it is a diadem.”

Clarinda’s father was amused and Clarinda was consumed with impatience.

“As I have said,” he went on, “this last effort caused me great trouble, but I found it. And now, Clarinda, what do you think it was?”

“I don’t know,” she answered. “Tell us? It must have been important if you went to all that trouble.”

“Listen carefully, both of you. It is a matter vital to your happiness, Clarinda. I—found—for Mrs. Clarinda Thorbald—a husband—who would think more of her and love her more

and would fill her life with greater content—and—”

Clarinda sprang from the divan. Her face was flushed, and she turned upon Peter. She put her hand over his mouth, and Peter struggled for an instant and then laughed loudly.

“Peter—Peter!” she exclaimed. “You are perfectly horrid. I don’t believe anything is sacred to you. Every bit of pleasure I might have had is destroyed. I hate your old house.”

Clarinda went out of the room and closed the door with a crash behind her.

The two men looked at each other; after a few moments the old man said laconically:

“You ought to know, Peter, that the spirit of jest is not a component part of the female make-up.”

He arose from the divan, put on his coat and hat and went painfully out of the door.

Peter left alone shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigarette, and with a sigh he fell back into the corner of the divan and looked pensively into the fire.

V

Several days went by before Clarinda recovered from the shock she had sustained during the conversation with her father and with Peter.

Clarinda made it a point never to disagree with Peter. She wanted to submerge herself in his moods and thoughts, to absorb his point of view. It was true that she often found Peter bombastic and egotistical and even foolish, but that did not alter her determination. Her observation of combative women, and to what end they came, was sure, and it meant always mental separation, so she determined to avoid this condition at whatever cost it might be to her own individuality. As he should go, so would she go.

When she had thought the matter over, she saw that she had been small, and decided that when they went to inspect the house she would assent to anything he would suggest.

Clarinda knew the house, and had often envied the people who had lived in it. It stood upon one of the most fashionable streets of the city. Surrounded by large gardens it stood

alone on the top of a hill, with a wall running around its borders that kept away the gaze of the public.

It had been built but a few years, by a man who had made progress in his undertakings. He built it after plans he had long thought of, and in it he had placed his hopes. Within its four walls he wanted to pass a wonderful life and a long existence.

The forces that control, however, took no interest in his plans, and he and his family moved in, and in only a short time he was smitten with an illness and all that he had hoped for was buried in a few feet of earth.

This man who built the house was filled with ambition. He imagined as he walked through the halls and its decorated rooms, with his wife, that they would live long and he would have the opportunity of showing those whom he knew what the proper condition of life should be. These two sat in the marvelous rooms and wandered in its gardens and made their futile plans.

Success had twisted their perspective; and the woman's perspective was even more badly twisted than the man's.

Fate stood back of them in the shadows and laughed at them and their vain imaginings.

The servants whom they hired to do their bid-

ding, grinned at their stupidity. They worked with secret grudgings in their hearts and stole from them with perfect equanimity. The man knew these things, but felt it was part of the price he had to pay.

In the world he was bowed down to and people he knew pointed their fingers at him and envied him his wealth and his big house. But fate came and crushed him. When he was gone fate went out of the doors to look for others to come into the house, and the place he had made for himself, and swept into its walls and gardens Clarinda and Peter.

Peter and Clarinda went in the front doors of the house of sorrow. The servants bowed and grinned. The clocks struck the hours with indifference, but Peter gloated. The automobile he had bought stood on the paved way. As they entered he handed Clarinda a deed for the place, and Clarinda smiled and kissed him. All the anger she had felt went from her heart. The newness of the place, its size compared with the flat, gave her pride just as it had Peter.

Peter took her through the rooms, and they passed from the hall into the parlors, then up the stairs into Clarinda's apartments. In the middle of the room stood Clarinda's little maid who gave assurance that all had not been swept away, that there was something to hold to.

Peter's joy was great. He babbled on without hindrance, and with pleasure took her into a tiny room just off the one they were in. There he had placed a divan, with a tall lamp behind it. In front of which was a fireplace, and on the irons lay wood ready to be lit.

Clarinda was pleased and she turned to Peter.

"It is very nice. Only, Peter, I am afraid it is too large. I don't think I am going to like it as much as I did the flat."

"Then you are not pleased that I bought it? Or is it because I joked with you?"

"I don't know," she replied. "I hate jokes, and I hate people who try them on me."

"I am sorry, but try to be happy if you can. Forgive me this time, for I only wanted it to be a surprise."

"I hate surprises," she said slowly.

"All right, never again," he said finally.

The little maid rushed about the place, for she liked the grandeur of the fittings, and the extent of the spaces.

Clarinda examined the arrangements with care. She went into the rooms Peter had fixed for himself, and found that they were quite far from her own. She could not decide whether she liked this or not. Peter had always

occupied the same room she had and it had worked very nicely.

She feared that a hiatus had come, and it would grow into a tolerance. Something new was creeping into her life, but she did not know whether it appealed to her or not in view of the dangers it concealed.

It was true in her father's house that her father and mother occupied separate rooms, and when she thought it over she remembered that it had worked well. They had managed to be very comfortable, physically and mentally. It might after all be much nicer. Probably with this arrangement she could collect about her things she liked and Peter could do likewise. Then it was conceded to be more civilized, and it would redound to her comfort in the mornings as she could have the maid help her to dress.

Peter kept her moving from one part of the house to the other, then he led her into the kitchen. It was as big as the rest of the place. There were all kinds of contrivances just as her mother had them. As she entered she was greeted by a big person in a white apron and a cap on his square ill-looking head, who announced he was the chef.

Clarinda smiled as he bowed low before her, but it chilled her, for she knew her one delight

was gone. No more would she be allowed to supervise what Peter ate. Never would she be allowed to dictate to the vegetable man, or the meat man, or the man who brought the eggs and the butter. Then a large person loomed out of the distance. A queer hard-faced person, who carried command in her manner, just such a person as Peter had described, who announced that she was the housekeeper.

Clarinda shrank back from all these, and a queer feeling went down her back. All these elaborate things that hung in festoons from the walls and hooks and this crowd of powerful servants scared her. She felt she had receded into the position of a marionette.

Quickly she drew Peter from the kitchen and went back by a hidden staircase to the little room with the tall lamp and the divan; for here Clarinda felt more at home.

Peter sat down in the corner of the divan and stretched his legs out in front of him. He was filled with a great complacency, as he pulled Clarinda down beside him. The tall lamp glowed behind them. The maid had lit the fire and the flames went up the chimney, just as they did in the flat.

“Well,” he asked, “how do you like the new nest I have got for you?”

Clarinda sat for a long time and made no

answer. Her face was drawn into a knot. She was thinking seriously. However, she tucked herself into her place beside him and took his hand in hers and her eyes were half closed as she gazed steadily into the fire.

“Father is coming presently,” she said at last, without answering his question. “I want him to look the place over, for he knows so much more than we do.”

“You’ve great faith in the judgment of your father—and apparently little in your husband,” Peter replied with a peeved tone in his voice.

“No—not—exactly—that,” she hesitated. “Ring the bell for the maid, Peter.”

Peter rang the bell, and the maid came in and stood inquiringly at the door.

“I want to do something, Peter,” she said.

“All right,” he answered.

Clarinda turned to the maid. “Bring some coffee for Mr. Peter and me. Don’t make it, but bring hot water and just the coffee and some toast.”

The maid curtsied and went out.

“Why that?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I am worried, Peter. I am all upset. I am trying to find out if I shall like this place. I feel as if something had given me a turn.”

Clarinda arose from the divan, and pulled a small table from the center of the room. When the maid came in she told her to go down and get some cups and saucers, then to fix the table as she used to have it.

The maid soon had the things as Clarinda wanted them, and Peter looked on in astonishment.

“Now, Peter, you sit down there at the end, and I shall sit here. Let’s pretend it is morning and you are having your breakfast and you are in a dreadful hurry.”

Peter sat down as he was told and waited for her to finish her preparations.

Clarinda was trying to drag herself back, but for some reason she could not. A new light had broken. Probably this was the rebirth her father had told her of.

As they sat opposite each other and she was making the coffee, the door to the room opened and her father came in smiling, seemingly happy over the new nest Peter had provided for his daughter.

Clarinda went over and kissed him. She helped him take off his coat and placed his cane in the corner, then she made a place for him at the table.

After he had sat down a desultory conversation began. They talked about the house and

its arrangements, concerning the extent of the garden, the placing of the lake which Peter contemplated, the number of servants, and the effect the house made from the outside. Clarinda listened while she busied herself making the coffee, and the maid brought in the toast.

The men continued to speak of various stocks, the rise and fall in foreign exchange, the effect of the rise in the prices of steel, but Clarinda took no interest in these things.

Without warning she broke in upon their conversation.

“I—I—don’t believe in this place. It seems to me to be too large. I feel as if my happiness had gone out of the window.”

The men looked at her as if not hearing what she said. They waited for her to pass the coffee, and it was evident her father was pleased.

“I wish I were back,” she broke in again.

“Oh, Clarinda!” exclaimed Peter. “That’s the first mean remark I ever heard you make.”

“I mean it!” she replied slowly.

“After all this struggle?” said her father.

“I’ve been thinking,” answered Clarinda.

“What! Women should not think, for it is bad for them,” her father put in smilingly.

“I’ve been thinking of many things lately,” she replied.

“Name one of these things, Clarinda,” Peter said banteringly.

“Everything is all wrong,” said Clarinda, as she left the table. She walked about with a nervous step. “Do you remember, Father, when I was married, you said that I was not dying, but that it was a rebirth?”

“Yes, I remember, Clarinda,” answered her father. “What is the trouble? You know my method, I always believe that there is nothing so good as an out-and-out discussion, if anyone feels in a wrong situation. It clarifies things and leaves no room for misunderstanding,” he said looking into Clarinda’s eyes. “People who are married drift into situations just on this account, because they refuse to speak of them. Now, tell us what it is you are thinking.”

“You are talking at random, trying to conjure up something that doesn’t exist. I know of no difficulty. Everything seems to me to be as calm as a summer’s day,” broke in Peter.

“There is a rift,” answered her father. “Let’s find it.”

“You are a pessimist. Where can there be a rift when two people are satisfied and understand each other perfectly?”

“How do you know these people are satisfied?” asked Clarinda. “Because one of them

is wrapped in his own complacency, it does not follow that the other person is in the same frame of mind." Clarinda had a queer look in her eyes.

"There you are," her father said quickly. He placed upon the table the cup he had in his hand. "Let Clarinda say what she means."

"I will," she replied firmly. "You both shall be arraigned. I've decided to drag you both before yourselves and will appeal to you both—place you both in the light I think you ought to occupy."

"Listen—listen—another Portia!" Peter carried deep mockery in his voice.

"Be quiet, Peter," commanded her father.

Clarinda flushed and looked kindly at the old man.

"I have thought—" she began.

"The lady thinks," laughed Peter.

"Yes, as queer as it may seem—the lady thinks," Clarinda put in. Peter noticed the look upon her face and it did not please him.

"Hush, Peter," said her father, laying his hand upon Peter's arm.

"As queer as it may seem to you," went on Clarinda. "The lady thinks, but she has thought for sometime past. The lady has come to know you two. She knows also that both of you think no woman should think. Never-

theless, they do think but at all times their thoughts are not pleasant.”

“What have you thought?” her father asked as if to encourage her.

“I’ve thought of my life and how extremely foolish it is. I’ve made a review of it, just while I was looking into the fire, and while I looked, it spread itself out before me, and made me ashamed. It is curious how rapidly one can think, and how a life that has covered years is gone over in a moment. I don’t like this big house. It comes to me just what my position will be.”

“The house is yours. You have the deed for it. I gave it to you,” said Peter.

“That’s true. I’ve a piece of paper that recites that fact, but it is of no value to me. The thing I want has gone out of the window.”

“I don’t follow you, Clarinda,” broke in her father.

“You will understand, Father.”

“Will I understand?” asked Peter.

“I don’t know,” she replied.

“Why won’t we understand?” asked Peter.

“I don’t know.”

“Go on, Clarinda,” said her father.

“I’ve something to say. It will no doubt fill you both with astonishment. It has been on my mind for a long time. The other things have

come to me only tonight. Listen, and get it carefully in your minds. Don't think I am indelicate or that I regret. I know it is the allotted thing for women. It is the natural condition. As you have both said so often, the one and only reason for women being in the world. I am going to be a mother."

"Clarinda!" exclaimed Peter. A curious wave went over him.

"I am not pleased," said her father, slowly as if turning the thing over in his mind. "It is dangerous."

"Irrespective of your ideas, it is true. I've said nothing about it before for many reasons," she went on. "You must not think for a moment that I am afraid. Nature doesn't allow me to be afraid. Many times since this thing has come upon me I have analyzed my sensations. I find my heart is filled with a curious kind of joy. I find my whole nature has undergone a change and that my outlook has expanded. It seems to me as if I've gone through a revolution. But there is something else, something that is closer to my heart than even that. It is supposed to be the closest thing that can come to a woman."

"For the Lord's sake! What else?" asked Peter with astonishment.

"There is much else. I have discovered that

I am all wrong," Clarinda went on quietly and slowly and her voice carried a peculiar tone of sadness. "My life is all wrong. My perspective is all wrong. I discover I've been submerged by you two. Still, I don't believe it is exactly all your fault. A great deal of it arises from my own point of view. But, now, I've come to a point. I have revolted. This revolt may arise from my condition. This condition may create this revolt. It seems to me as if it were a physical awakening. I don't know where to place the blame. It may be your fault, Peter. But it is more the fault of my mother and father. They laid down the lines, and Peter simply follows out these limits as they had placed them."

Her father did not reply. To him it was wonderful to hear her speak. It interested him vitally, for as far as he was concerned it placed Clarinda in a new light. He had never thought it was in her to have an idea except such as was conveyed to her by either Peter or himself. It was a new concept. He could not judge if she were making a mistake or not. He waited for her to say more.

"All my life," she began again, "I've been trained by people who tried to avoid for me any phase of life that might be difficult. As I see it, my existence has been made a bed of roses.

Temptation has been kept from me. Existence as it is has been pushed aside. Luxury has been spread at my feet. Everything has been done to lead me to believe that in the world there was nothing but ease and comfort. I was allowed to look only upon the bright side. The lights were always lit, and yet I lived in a haze. Somehow I felt during all the years I lived that it was wrong. But I did not try to reason the thing out. I could not. What is the result? I am the result." Clarinda stopped and then with a new tone in her voice went on:

"The result is that you've created a woman without force, a puny thing that can be argued into any position. Think of it! By two men who are as narrow in their point of view of women as the creases in their shirt fronts, by two men who have looked upon me as a toy, or a piece of Dresden china. Something that should give them pleasure, a puppet, walking about on two legs. Now, listen, I don't blame either of you as I should. I blame much more the environment in which I was born. Here is the remarkable thing about it. Since this new condition has come upon me, as I told you—I have undergone a change. It is psychological as well as physical. It startles me and I feel as if something had been torn from me. I have revolted. Out of this revolution is created a

new personality and the birth of this personality is causing me as much pain as I shall suffer with the birth of my child."

"But, Clarinda," interposed her father, "your premises are wrong. Your argument is poor. Why should you not have been protected and advised by older minds? Why should you not have the easiest way? I could afford it. I certainly thought it for the best. My love for you did this thing. Peter has lived with but one thought in his mind, which is you."

"I, too, object to your statements, just as your father does, for I feel it a pleasure to give you all that you want. There is nothing else in life for me but that. I can't see why you would deny me this one thing," Peter broke in as her father finished speaking.

"You are both wrong," Clarinda said quickly. "Look at the result of your misapplied consideration. What is the result? As I said, a puppet, a thing without color, or a mere toy. It is terrible to think of. It is so unjust, so unfair. If anybody knew me as I am they would laugh or weep. I don't know which. But thank heavens that is done before it is too late and I am about to enter upon a second stage, a new development. I have shed this thing as a cloak, I have awakened to a change that has come—a vital change, so big that you in your

little minds, I doubt if you can appreciate what it is. In the place of the toy and the puppet here stands a woman. I hope a force, an intellectual entity."

"And—," began Peter. But before he could formulate a sentence, Clarinda had raised her hand.

"Stop! As I told you, I am about to become a mother. It is curious how this condition has affected me. I should like to tell you, to describe the mental adjustment that has taken place, but I doubt whether I can."

"Go on!" commanded her father. "What has happened? What has taken place? What do you feel?"

"I don't know if I can," Clarinda replied. "It is too great a revolution. You might not believe what I have thought. You might think my words were just words. You might think I was versed in psychosis. I will try, however. You ask me what has happened? A wonderful thing has happened. As I look at it. This is what has happened. Hitherto, I have lived as if behind an impenetrable veil. Of a sudden this thing has been torn apart and a dazzling light, almost more than I can face, has broken in upon me, and is leaving me dazed. The new situation is almost impossible for me to face, and this is what has happened. Then you ask

me what has taken place? This—I am another person. In me has been raised a peculiar animal instinct. I have reverted to the field. There is no feeling of fear. It is more—one of preservation, not so much of myself, but rather of the life that is quickening in me. This is what has taken place. I want to fight, I don't know what I want to fight. Then—you ask me, what do I feel? I feel joy. I have lost my lethargy. I am excited. Every movement in me is one of distinct anticipation. And I don't know what I anticipate."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Peter.

"I am done," she said finally. "There is only one request I have to make, and there is only one thing that I want. I am willing to go through this period. That is, I want to go back to the flat. For once I should be allowed to do as I please. Honestly, Peter," and her voice was full of pleading. "I don't like this place. It is too big. It is too much. I can ever occupy in it but a secondary position. I dislike the housekeeper, the chef, the maids, and the spaces. I've only a short time to pass through, and for that short time I want things as I wish to have them."

"Yes, I would go back, Peter," put in her father.

"No, for it is only a whim, probably aroused

by her condition. I understand women often take these turns when they are as she is. It is foolish," Peter answered with anger.

"We are going back," replied Clarinda, with a fixity of purpose. "Why not? I may die. I may be ill for a long time. Why should I not have what I want? But remember I am not afraid of this thing."

"When do you want to go back?" asked Peter.

"Now," she answered shortly.

"It can't be done."

"I think Clarinda is reasonable," her father said.

"But what of all these people?" asked Peter.

"They are certainly no more important than I am. Are they?" Clarinda asked.

Peter arose from the divan and shrugging his shoulders stepped over to the wall and touched a button. Presently the woman with the big jaw and the impenetrable face came in. Peter turned to her as she entered.

"Mrs. Caws, Mrs. Thorbald doesn't like this place," said Peter stupefied with anger. Clarinda stopped him.

"I shall tell Mrs. Caws, Peter," she said quickly. "Please, Mrs. Caws, will you be kind enough to dismiss the servants. Mr. Thorbald and I have decided to go away for sometime.

You will see to the closing of the house. That is all, Mrs. Caws."

Mrs. Caws went out.

"It is done, Peter."

"Do you think that settles it, Clarinda?"

"Yes, that settles it, Peter," and Clarinda smiled wearily as she rose and left the room.

STAGE TWO

I

A great deal of water had run under the bridge since Clarinda had left the big house and gone back to the flat. A great deal more water had run under the bridge before Clarinda had consented to come back to the big house and had settled permanently in its rooms and halls.

Her child had been born, it had thrived and grown, her father had aged. Rarely he came to the house unless he was assisted by his man, and then only when the sun was bright and the sky unclouded. Peter had grown more successful and had acquired the Midian touch. Gold came to him as penury comes to most. His arrogance and bombast had grown greater. Her mother remained in the background. Removed from all contact with Clarinda and her life, she came to the house very seldom and then only to complain. She appeared to think her duty toward Clarinda finished and reasoned as she had given Clarinda birth, raised her to womanhood and married her off, she had done for her all that a mother could do.

Having finished her duty, she gave herself up

to a life of pleasure, and she caromed from one gaiety to another like the balls upon a billiard table, propelled by a professional.

The going from the flat to the house had been considered by Clarinda for many, many months before she reached a decision. She thought it out carefully. She argued the thing from all sides, and came to the conclusion that probably she might be in error, as many women err who are in love. Without consideration of her own happiness she gave in before the arguments of her father and of Peter.

Peter won the first great point in their lives. On the day they came back Mrs. Caws again stood in front of them with a curious smile upon her hard old features; he gloated upon his victory, and gave orders with unction. It pleased him immensely, and it swelled him with his own importance. He felt it was by his own strength of will that he compelled Clarinda to accept the exact position he deemed proper a woman should occupy in relation to her husband. His joy on the whole was complete, for woman to him was a woman properly placed.

Clarinda looked at him narrowly. Her mind was in a state of chaos. She felt in her soul that she had lost something she could never recover. Yes, she knew his outlook, and although she knew it she hated it fiercely.

If it had not been that by persistent effort through a term of years, Clarinda had taught herself to control her tears, she would have wept. But she had learned in these years how to control her tears. Tears had no effect upon Peter, for when she wept, Peter only scorned her. So she found that she aroused no pity in his heart.

Steadily Clarinda had fought the move from the old to the new, but Peter had fought even as consistently. His strength resulted in her defeat and so it came about. After they had entered the house Peter helped her off with her wraps. At a signal to Mrs. Caws, who had been standing close by, she left the hall. As she closed the door behind her, Clarinda turned to Peter and said slowly as if repeating a line she had heard,

“My happiness has gone out of the window.”

Peter tossed his head. A wicked smile crossed his lips. He spoke with bitter sarcasm.

“I can’t understand your attitude, Clarinda. It seems to me if anyone had given me such a place as this, I would rather have said my happiness had come in by the window.”

Clarinda paid no attention to his reply. She continued to speak in the same painful voice:

“You’ve won, Peter,” and her lips trembled as she stopped for an instant. “It is the little

things in life that count. It is the tiny pebble that changes the course of the stream. Yes, Peter, you've won—and at what a price."

"It represents thousands and thousands, Clarinda," he replied, without getting her point of view.

"Money—money—money! That is your fetish. You are carried away with gold! It will bury eventually all that is good in you."

"Oh, I don't know," he replied. "Money may be rotten and all that; but from my observation it is a most comfortable sort of possession."

"Where is your soul?"

"Rot!" he exclaimed. "Why be trite? Souls in this world? A curious superstition handed down from no one knows where. A relic of fear. A thing to dangle before the eyes of the sick to help them die with a smile. A sop to the sick. A thing to dangle before the ignorant. Of what avail are they? Sometimes, I wonder whether you will ever graduate into the sort of woman I want. Must you always have a child's point of view?"

"What sort of woman do you want, Peter?" she asked looking at him closely. "Since you've won this point, if you will tell me I will be that sort."

Peter walked away from her a few steps

then after a short while he turned and replied.

“I’ve thought a lot about the sort of woman I want. It is difficult to come to an exact conclusion. When I am idle I picture to myself the sort I think I should have. It is a very hard proposition.”

“Express it, Peter! You’ve never had difficulty on that score.”

“Sometime I will. I can’t do it now for it would take too long. I am very busy. I’ll tell you some other time.”

“I want you to do it now. Explain!” Clarinda broke forth. “I don’t believe you ever can explain! I see!—I know!—I may be stupid and only a child—but I know! Another illusion has been torn from me, and the bare bone is left.”

Clarinda turned to go out of the door that led to the upper reaches of the house. Peter went after her quickly. He took her hand in his and led her unwillingly toward the sofa that stood to one side.

“Sit down here,” he commanded, “for just a moment. I am going to try to tell you what I mean.” Clarinda sat down and bent her head forward looking intently at the floor in front of her. A deep serious gaze was in her eyes. “I am going to tell you what I mean,” he continued repeating himself. “It is true,

Clarinda, that I've not much time, but we might as well thrash the thing out. I am going to put before you the position I occupy. You've always been square and able to see how just I am. Now listen."

In the more than three years they had been married, Clarinda had lost none of her sweetness of look. Peter was forced to concede that much. Since the baby had come, it appeared to him that an added lustre had been given to her. She had developed wonderfully. Her figure and the lines of her young face had been metamorphosed. The baby represented to him another incident in life—a component part of the progress.

He sat down beside her and looked at her bent body. But he would not let himself be swayed, for he felt this would not be just to himself. The time had come when Clarinda must be brought to face the exalted position he had constructed for her and for himself.

They sat close together and Peter chose his words with infinite care. With as much certainty and deliberation as if he were placing a matter of great moment before one of the numerous boards of directors to which he belonged.

"This," he began slowly, "is my position and I think you ought to realize it perfectly. I

am, what is normally termed, a successful man, having arrived at this position by my own efforts. It is vital to me that you fill this position with me. You know, if you have ever considered the matter, that a wife assumes more or less the position of either an employee or a partner in a marriage contract. A thing like this is not all of one side. Butterflies are all well enough in a garden, but only in a garden. In the grand scheme they amount to nothing. If either of the contracting parties does not arise to his or her part, the one not arising assumes a minor position in the operation. In other words, she or he loses his standing as a partner. He or she stands apart in the fight. You will concede that life is a fight, a survival of the fittest. This you must acknowledge is correct. It stands without discussion. It is a syllogism.”

Clarinda listened to his words and her mind followed each sentence as he spoke. In her arose a wrath complete. He destroyed every foundation upon which she had hoped to build her existence. However, she said nothing.

Peter continued: “I admit I love you. It would distress me beyond words if I thought for an instant that love didn’t exist in me and if the same thing didn’t animate your spirit. You must understand that my love isn’t an ef-

fervescing thing, but a solid unfrothed condition. Stable and certain. Pushed aside, it is true, by necessities, but existent. Now, with that love, as I say a certainty, it is required of you to fulfill your part of the contract to expand, to develop, to spread, even as I have spread."

"Do you think you love?" asked Clarinda. "Have you ever thought in your dissection of this matter of how I have suffered for you? I suffered terribly when the baby came. I suffered for months with a painful illness. But that is of no importance. The baby is only part of me, a thing—how should I say?"

"Don't try," he said quickly. "Suffering is part of your life, just as this disappointment in you is an adjunct of mine, a necessary part of our existence to be treated philosophically. It amounts to nothing. When the pain is assuaged you cannot remember its effects. You speak of love, our love. What of our love? My opinion of this matter of love, is this. Love is a proper condition and should be in every house, but in the main it amounts to nothing. It has no intrinsic value. Nature does not recognize love. It only sees propinquity which it reduces to the necessity of reproduction. Do you suppose love exists in the lower forms of life? It does not. I love, but I don't allow love

to obscure my larger view. I submerge it and put it to its proper uses. What does love mean? Nothing but a moment's forgetfulness—passion—children—probably better if never born. It is useful in its place, but in the grand scheme it has no place. Of course you suffer—why not? But you should realize that never can a woman arrive at the proper point of view. They are too animal-like and too physically disarranged. They are by far too bound down by their natural destiny. It is unnecessary for me to mention what that destiny is."

"Do you believe what you are saying? Don't you think you're just talking, Peter?" Clarinda broke in as he paused for an instant.

"I believe I am not just talking for talk's sake. I've no time to waste in idle words. There is one more thing. No doubt you probably think what I have said is cruel. I admit it sounds cruel. It is cruel, because all life is cruel. The coming of your child was cruel. The coming of age upon you is cruel, nature is the epitome of cruelty, it crushes without stint or consideration. It builds only to destroy."

"What a curious philosophy," Clarinda's voice quavered. "Then I have failed. How queer. And the baby—"

"The baby," he went on with even as great care as he had used, "the baby is a thing apart,

an accident in life, which was desired by neither of us. Why should we have babies? I've asked myself this many times and arrived at no solution. Why produce these things? An uncontrolled animal instinct forces us to bring them into the world, and for what? When I see babies I generally weep. I see before me the future, the futility of youth, the sadness of the middle period, the arrival at puberty, then the going forth to seek a mate, the development of the sex instinct, and then the shriveling and shrinking into the grave. I would not say, Clarinda, that you had failed, I would not go that far. It is hard to explain. I shall try to think it out further."

Clarinda arose from the sofa, and went to one of the long windows that gave a view out upon the garden. She gazed unseeingly over its expanse, and spoke in a tone so low that he from his distance could barely hear her.

"I do not believe as you believe, Peter, I am glad to say. I can't tear things apart as you do, and I am glad I cannot. It is terrible to think as you think. It makes everything so black, so discouraging. Even with this view of yours there are things even more vital; if possible, more vital than money and success. You've said frightful things to me; you think you are analytical, logical, but you are not; you

only destroy. It is horrible to me to think that it is only a little over three years since we were married and already the good in you has died, and for what? Money, and a false philosophy built upon—nothing! Oh! how I hate money, success, riches and places like this. How I wish we were poor!”

“Then, probably, Clarinda, instead of lashing you with indisputable logic, I would be beating you with a whip. Everything is comparative. You speak in broken tones, as if a tragedy had come upon you. Life is a tragedy. But it is foolish to think of it so. Why not face facts?”

“Facts! Facts! Nothing but facts!” Clarinda almost screamed. “It is a tragedy. You remember, Peter, at one time Father said our lives were too prosaic. How mistaken he was. He could not see tragedy even if it stalked directly in front of him. Poor soul. He said, if you remember, that it would be a good thing for us if we had a *murder*, a *great theft*, or that you or I should lead a *double life*. That this sort of thing would lend interest. Poor Father. He didn’t know that tragedy was upon me. That murder was in your heart and that you were preparing to commit murder, only in a worse way than the actual stabbing or shooting me to death. It would have been better if

you had done it that way, than to have done it, as you say, with indisputable logic. It might have been better for me had I been the wife of a drunkard. He might have beaten me with whips. But at least he would have left hope in my heart. Now I have nothing. Yes, yes, Peter, you have won. You should be proud of your victory.”

Peter arose from the divan and walked quickly and impatiently up and down the hall. He did not think Clarinda would take the change he was forced to bring about so much to heart. He had convinced himself she would see it as he did.

“You are dramatic, Clarinda, and unnecessarily so. I don’t believe you think.”

“I’ve been taught that to think was wrong. I know now women should not think. It might be better if they did. For without thought they only invite disaster. We will see, Peter, but don’t be disappointed if this philosophy doesn’t come to your end. You’ve said I have failed you. I promise not to fail in the future.”

Clarinda turned from the window and went quickly out of the room, and she closed the door gently behind her. Peter made a motion as if to stop her, but he did not. He felt it were better that she should work the new situation

out in her mind. He was convinced she would see the justice of his position.

Presently he went out of the house and entered the automobile that waited for him at the door. As he settled himself back in the cushions of the car, he reverted to the first refusal Clarinda had made when she left the big house upon her first induction into it. He had never forgiven her for this. He had tried to make excuses for her, but could find none even when he ascribed it to her condition at the time; but her consistent attitude in her refusal divorced this excuse from his mind. It had hurt him immeasurably when he considered the time and the effort he had expended to accumulate the place. Her stubbornness and wilful conduct destroyed his ambition.

He knew he would never get over the blow from the instant she had given it to him. His mental attitude towards her underwent a change, a change so vital that he would never be able to overcome it. Clarinda fell from the pinnacle upon which he had placed her and had descended into the mere wife. She had become a necessary evil in his life, but not a component part thereof.

As he allowed her to go out of the door, he reflected he had caused a change and he would abide by it. If it evolved a bad situation, he

would accommodate himself to the new condition. He was too busy to give it more thought, it might take his mind off his real effort. Peter tossed his head in the air and as the car went swiftly along his tongue evolved the few words:

“What a hell of a bore!”

Clarinda watched him go from the window in her apartment. She heard the automobile that waited outside. She heard the engine start and she heard Peter give his order to the driver. A great black pall came over her. She went from the window and sank hopelessly upon the divan. Clarinda buried her lovely head in a cushion and thought.

With clearness she saw her position. She knew from now on that instead of being an integral part of Peter's life she was but his legalized mistress, clothed with respectability. All her hopes died, and all her anticipations for herself and her baby died and were swept by the angry winds of adversity into space. Clarinda wept.

After a long time by superhuman effort she collected herself, and forced a new spirit into her life. She was no more the Clarinda who had existed. Her love for Peter died. She stood untrammelled—free.

She rang the bell that was near at hand.

“I will go out,” she said to the maid as she entered the room. “Order my car.”

The maid whispered almost to herself. “Something has happened.”

Clarinda put on her wraps, and it was only a few moments when the car was at the door. She entered it and gave an order to the driver.

Then, “Horrors!” she muttered.

II

The car sped over the road. Occasionally the driver turned for directions. Clarinda's only reply was to drive faster. It seemed to her the only thing she desired was motion, such motion as might keep pace with her thoughts.

A feeling of despair overcame her, for her body suffered with her mind. Futility was even more dominant than ever. She had become imbued with the spirit of Peter, that nothing in the world was of any avail, that to fight against a surrounding condition was of no use, that all things were controlled by an invisible force, a force that laughed at any effort to set it aside from its driven path. There was nothing left. It was all reduced to her as a difficulty without a sign of relief.

All that she believed in was destroyed. Even the struggle she had made to make for herself and Peter a life as near an approach to the ideal as possible had fallen to pieces. There was left of her endeavor—nothing.

In the midst of her madness the face of her child came before her. She hated it even as she hated all things. Her hate for Peter was

paramount and a greater hate existed in her heart for her father. Her bitterness seemed to concentrate against her father, for it was he who had tutored her into the thing she was. The education he gave her had blighted her life, by leaving her unprepared to meet its vicissitudes, its necessities, and demands.

She sought in her mind for an excuse for them, but could find none. At last as if some great force had taken Peter and her father and stripped them of their flesh, laying bare their innermost souls, she looked into their breasts and saw of what they were made.

Heretofore her face had never betrayed a sign of hardness. It became hard, and her eyes changed color, her cheeks took upon them a different bloom. Her whole body changed under the blow she had received. A determination came into her and broke down all the barriers to her better self. All these barriers she had erected through years of endeavor were gone, and cast into the dust heap.

As a snake sheds its skin, so Clarinda shed all that had been the old Clarinda.

The impasse brought a new factor, one actuated by a woman of new motives. It brought a woman's mind dark and seething and bitter, and Clarinda felt the change and shivered with

fear at the prospect. She could not decipher to what end it would lead her.

Clarinda balanced her account with life and found it all written in red. Never had she received from it anything but the most terrible futility. Evil was not of her, but she determined it should come. All the good she scattered at her feet, breaking it as a frail piece of glass. From now on she would follow in the steps of those whom she had looked up to. Henceforth, she would gather the bitter, no matter what the poison might be.

Where she would land or to what end it should bring her, she cared not. With indefatigable sincerity she had tried to do what she thought was right. This had landed her in a morass of disappointment, and made her only the mistress of the man to whom she had been married. It was not her fault. It was the fault of Peter and her father and she was determined that they should pay. The price they should pay would be the price of death. For the years she had been married she had patted Peter upon the back and helped him with unswerving faith. Now, she should destroy with the same determination what she had endeavored to build. He should pay and pay in the coin he knew nothing of. Her father likewise should pay, for it was he who had spurred

Peter on. Endlessly he told him in long conversations, during many nights, of his ability, until Peter believed he was impregnable. He caused Peter to lose all sense of proportion.

Clarinda was not angry at her own position; it was deeper than that. She would seek her own emancipation, for her life was destroyed. Why not bring down the temple with her in her fall, grind it, grind it out into powder that would leave no trace of its original intent?

“Vengeance is mine saith the Lord, I will repay.” Clarinda knew this line, but it had no significance.

She put her hand upon the arm of the driver and told him to turn back and she directed him to the house of her father. In a short time she arrived. After the car stopped at the marble steps that led to his glory, she sprang from its interior and ran into the hall, the same hall she had come from with hope in her heart and visions of perfect joy in her soul. Then all the world had looked to her as if it desired to cover her with a mantle of good. Now it was gone, obliterated, wiped out and nothing remained. It was futile. In the place of promises it had given nothing and the struggle she had made was a vain endeavor.

Rapidly she walked across the hall and went

up the stairs. She pushed open the door and entered the room in which her father sat.

In three years a change had come upon him. His limbs almost refused to carry his body. His hands shook pitifully. His eyes lacked in lustre, they had died, before he had died. Around his shoulders, limp and lost in form, hung a blanket of rich design to protect him from any draft that might steal insidiously across the floors. His head shook, even as his hands. All about him was disintegration. A sickness that portended death enveloped him.

He had been sitting there for months, and ever before his old, dim eyes came images of those who had gone before. He saw them when he was left alone and in the night they were even more present. They seemed to beckon to him across the dark passage he was confronting and he thought they smiled and their smiles seemed to him to be smiles of derision. Always they pointed at him with bony fingers and their fleshless jaws clashed with a painful noise. He feared and trembled with dread. There was no hope and he knew it, death was at hand. It was only tomorrow.

Often he saw the opened grave that would receive his worn-out body, and all would be ended. There was no hope of immortality. He believed in nothing. He saw but death, dirt

and disintegration. When he had ceased to breathe, he would become carrion to be devoured by countless maggots.

The old man wept with regret and begged in his innermost self that he might be given a few more moments. Sometimes, the tears ran down his old, withered face. They fell mockingly upon his clothes and stained them as if with blood. He would slink back into the folds of his chair as if from its depths he could find protection from the thing he dreaded.

Clarinda as she entered the room saw him drawn back into his chair. She watched his hands shake and tremble as if with the palsy and pity went out of her heart, she wanted him to die. Clarinda linked her revenge with him. She wanted the death of this worn-out old man in front of her. He was dying, she knew it, and she rejoiced that it was so. The condition in which she found herself was his burden. Pity had died and nothing was left, there was no surcease. The thing was before her that had produced her and of this thing she would have revenge. She suffered and her suffering was greater than his. His was ended while hers stretched out for years. There was no such end for hers, as his. There was a stone in her breast where her heart should have been. She would carry this stone for endless years.

Clarinda threw off her coat. She did not go to her father, nor place the cover about him with her hands.

Her father looked at her and pride filled his heart. He envied her her youth and would have sacrificed her for a few more years of life. He was human and acknowledged it. Clarinda hated him as she hated Peter and she could not say which one she hated the more. Even her child she hated.

Her father stretched out his hand to her and placed his face to hers that she might kiss him. Clarinda did not move but stood directly in front of him. Her eyes were narrowed. A bitter smile flitted across her face. Clarinda saw him shake. She looked, as his hand fell inert at his side.

"It is over," she said slowly.

"What is over?" her father asked mumbling his words.

Clarinda sat down in a chair and pulled it over in front of him. Her manner did not change. She kept her eyes fixed upon his face.

"It is over," she repeated. "Life is queer. Don't you think so, Father?"

"Yes, yes!" he answered. "What do you mean?"

"You are dying and it is fortunate it is so," she replied with conviction in her voice.

The old man shrank back further in his chair. He turned his eyes towards her and looked eagerly into her face. He trembled in an agony of fear—he could not understand. He asked himself if in one day there had come such a change. Were the hands of the dead stretched out any more insistently today than yesterday?

“Do I look worse?” he asked pitifully.

“Yes, you are worse. Your hands are worse. Your face is more drawn. I can see a great change,” she replied, following with her eyes the effect of her words. It pleased her that he felt so deeply. Then she added:

“I believe you are dying. I believe that to-day when the sun goes down you will be dead. You’ve not fought, as you should have fought. You are as weak as I thought you would be.”

“Clarinda! Clarinda!” he screamed.

“Why do you fear? What’s the use? The thing is upon you. It is here. You must die. And now!” Clarinda smiled, her satisfaction was intense. Had he not murdered her? Had he not destroyed her? Was not her destruction greater than the destruction she passed on to him?

The old man gasped and his heart beat with fury in his breast. He could barely see her as she sat before him. He could not understand

this curious change that had come to her, his Clarinda, the thing he had loved and worshiped.

“Why this, Clarinda, when you know my condition?” he stuttered.

“I will tell you,” she said intensely. “Through all my life you aimed to destroy me, even from my youth.”

As she was about to continue the door opened and Peter rushed into the room. Clarinda sprang quickly from her chair, as she heard him enter. He cast a look toward the huddled heap in the chair, and in a moment he saw that it was dead.

“What has happened? I suspected that you were up to something,” he said.

“You are the matter,” Clarinda replied turning from him and walking to the other side of the room.

“What have I done?” he asked, his face turning pale.

“You ask!” Clarinda exclaimed.

“I ask,” he said with wonder in his voice.

“What you have done is finished. There is the result.”

The figure in the chair slipped down a little further. The helpless hands dropped limp beside the chair, and a curious look of repose spread itself over the gray ashen face. A bit of saliva trickled from the open mouth.

Peter cried aloud and the house went into a turmoil. He tried to pull the old dead man back into the chair. It was useless, for gradually the body slipped to the floor and lay bent in curious contortions. Clarinda went out of the door, down through the hall and entered the car, and ordered the driver to take her home.

A fury that was intense drove her, but there was no pity in her heart. She wanted revenge and she would persist in bringing it about.

Peter followed her shortly and found her sitting upon the divan. There was no disturbance in her attitude. Clarinda sat quietly. On the floor in front of her was her child. It played unmindful of the tragedy about it. It cooed and looked occasionally at its mother. Clarinda bent her eyes towards it and wished in her heart it was as dead as her father. Should it be raised to sorrow such as she had? Would it put its trust in some great thing and have that trust destroyed? She could kill it with her own hands. It would take but a moment. Its life was held by a slender thread and her hands were strong.

Peter saw the look on her face as he entered. Quickly he took the child from the floor as if to protect it from her. Clarinda did not move.

"Your father is dead," Peter said.

"I know it," she replied shortly.

“You’ve killed him.”

“I know it,” she answered in a deadened voice.

“Why?” Peter asked.

“He is dead,” she answered. “It is better so. I am not sorry. You should have seen his fear. It was pathetic.”

“Why did you do it?” Peter asked, with awe in his voice.

“I am someone else. Probably such a wife as you want. I am different. My other self has died even as my father has died.”

“God forbid! I didn’t know!” Peter gasped.

“Go!” she demanded.

“You would have killed the child. I had a premonition. That is why I followed you. You would have killed the child?”

“Yes, I would have killed it. Why not? It is only the emblem of my degradation. It would not have mattered. Death may have saved it much.”

“Clarinda!” Peter trembled from head to foot. His mind was in a whirl. He could not understand.

“It is useless. Go!” Clarinda turned her face from him and walked over to one of the windows that gave a view of the garden.

Peter went out of the room, carrying the child with him and left her alone.

III

For the next day, and the next day, and the next day, Clarinda sat in a stupor. She revolved the death of her father about in her mind with such rapidity, that she sensed nothing of it. A new and curious development grasped her, and she could not understand what the development portended, or in what direction it was leading.

The preparations for the funeral, the long discussions with her mother as to the proper thing to do did not move her. It was a thing apart. Everything was mechanical. All passed over her head without stirring an emotion.

When a lucid moment came to her and she examined herself, she could not decide if she had been cruel or kind in hastening the end of the parent she had adored. She tried to talk to Peter about it, but Peter would not listen to her. Yet out of it, she could not, even though she tried, force one iota of pity for the old man. It appeared to her to be a peculiar cataclysm.

She asked herself over and over again, why had she thought of killing the child? It was in no way responsible for anything. Yet she

could have done it and felt no more sorrow than she felt at the death of her father. To her the child did not represent youth, it represented a term of years. It was old enough to die. It had life, and her great desire was to crush something that had life. She had not done it at the moment because it came to her in a flash, that the child was too young to appreciate the condition under which she suffered. It would not have sensed the words she would have said to it, before she would have crushed its life out. It struck her from this point of view that it would have been a useless sacrifice. It would have been just as useless to kill Peter, for then he would have been dead and removed from any further suffering. This would not have been wise, for it was her purpose that he should feel, where she could see, the degradation to which he had reduced her, so she let him live.

Peter left her in her solitude. It was only broken by the coming and going of her mother from time to time. She never asked for the child. In a vague way she knew it was being taken care of by its numerous nurses and its attendant physician, but in her heart she hated it, for it represented to her something terrible.

Peter, however, sought it out and looked after its material comforts. Peter was afraid to

leave it alone. He was frightened at the outcome of his trial of strength with Clarinda. He could see the look on her face as he had entered the room after the sudden death of her father and the expression with which she looked at the child as it cooed up at her from the floor. He could not make out why he had followed her, or what force had compelled him to leave her father's house in the midst of the turmoil of the death. For some unknown reason he had slipped away to his own home with fear grasping his heart, for he presaged a new disaster. Why, he could not tell.

Day followed day with him even as it followed with Clarinda, and the time of the funeral was upon them. Mechanically they went to the house, and they sat about for some hours before the company came to pay the last rites to the owner.

Clarinda's mother sat in proper gloomy silence. Her great body heaved at intervals with emotion. A tear at times stole down her face. She blew her nose, making a noise that appeared painful to Clarinda, and over her face was hung a heavy black veil that hid her entirely from the gaze of the people, who gradually filed in and took seats in prescribed limits. Clarinda thought her mother looked like a lump. She sat quite near the flower-covered casket

that held the body of the old man, and it was black, with silver handles.

Candles gave a fitful light and the tiny blaze they bore swung here and there like imprisoned souls, that longed to be free. Tiny trails of smoke went from them into the air, and the smoke melted away in the mass of flowers which decorated the mantels and the casket.

Clarinda like her mother was covered with a veil. She looked through it, and it came back to her vividly the last time a crowd of people had been gathered in this same place. It had been decorated as now, except an altar stood where the casket was now. It was swept as then with a soft breeze when the doors to the hall were opened. Almost the same people were here now as were here then. A musician presided at the organ before and the soft tones filled the hall then as now. The only difference was that the song was changed. Instead of "O Perfect Love," it played now, "Nearer, My God, to Thee." As then, now a small voice sang in the offing and the sweet, gentle tones filled the hall even as before.

Then, there were smiles and tones of laughter and now only suppressed polite moanings. Sorrow instead of joy, tears instead of laughter. None of the guests weaved his way across the polished floors. They sat stiff, immovable. In-

stead of a bridegroom, an undertaker slipped noiselessly about the place, like some gnome, or bird of ill omen. The priest was still. He stood beside the coffin and in a few moments read in subdued tones from his rubric and his face was drawn and somber. There was none of the lightsomeness of the other occasion when he had married the man to Clarinda, who sat stiff and stolid beside her.

Peter looked about furtively. He saw the mother of Clarinda and wondered why she should be so grief-stricken. He had known her as a person who delighted in the Church and believed perfectly in its history and its manifold benefits. He knew she prayed each night that she might be taken up into heaven and stand upon the right hand of the Throne of Power. He could not understand how with her belief she could not have rejoiced at the death of this person. To him it was a wonderful release. The fight was done. The struggle to hold on to the meagre possessions that this one had accumulated was over. He had succeeded.

To him the atmosphere was bad. The paid pall-bearers were bad, they seemed an incongruous note in the place, he disliked them. He hoped in his heart that when he should become as the one in the box, that some of his friends

would carry him out of his house and place him in the hearse. Peter did not fear death. He liked to dwell upon it. He liked to try to reason exactly what it meant to him, for he looked upon it as a release. He believed nothing and feared nothing. Peter scoffed at religion and it amused him to discover that the symbols of the church were the same as those to which the Egyptians bowed thousands of years ago.

They left the house, and they came back again. The dirt had fallen with a hollow sound over the bones of the old man. They ate. The flowers had disappeared from the hall. The servants resumed their same tones of servility and nature reasserted itself and life went on as before.

Clarinda and he went back to their own house. Peter lit a cigarette, and stretched himself. Clarinda sat upon the divan, and didn't think of anything. Time went by her without notice.

Peter blew the smoke from his cigarette into the air, and it curled in fantastic waves about his head and sank away into nothingness. His mind was almost as much a blank as Clarinda's. He could not think, things had happened so rapidly that his head was in a whirl and he saw the future darkly.

The maid came into the room and asked

quietly whether they desired anything, but received no response from either of them. She went out as quietly as she had come, and she shook her head as she closed the door behind her. Under her breath she said as if to herself:

“I’ve seen many just like these. It is the end. They will separate. It is bad, and she so beautiful.”

The sun gradually went down and the dark came into the room. The things about them grew indistinct and the shadows died. The wind came up outside and sighed around the building. They did not move. Clarinda felt the strain. Peter grew nervous and moved his feet about on the rug as if to relieve the tension. Clarinda did not move from the position which she took when she first sank upon the divan. Her hands hung listlessly by her side and her head was sunk back upon one of the big cushions. Hour after hour they sat. Peter suddenly sprang from the divan and screamed, but Clarinda did not move. She seemed not to hear him. Peter arose from his seat and paced up and down the room. His step was nervous, excited and the perspiration gathered upon his forehead. He wiped it away with his hand. His face became pale and haggard and he stumbled over the rugs. It was only with an

intense effort that he saved himself from falling. In an agonized voice he spoke. He was incoherent. He spoke rapidly and his words tumbled over each other and he wiped his forehead again as he stopped in front of her.

"For God's sake speak!" he exclaimed. "I am going mad. I can't stand the strain. Say something! It is horrible!"

"I've nothing to say," Clarinda answered quietly.

"You're a murderess!" he said with a trembling voice. He lost control of his speech. He kept on talking but he did not know what he said. Again he wiped his forehead with his open hand. It was wet.

"Stop!" exclaimed Clarinda. "You don't know what you say. Someone might hear you. There are servants in the house."

"I don't care. I shall scream it from the housetops. I want everyone to know I've married a murderess." Peter sank hopelessly back upon the divan.

Clarinda put out her hand and placed it upon his arm. Her touch made him shiver. He drew away from her.

"You're a philosopher, but you're a liar. You teach, but you fear your own teaching. You fight and when you lose, you weep. You destroy and you give nothing in return."

Clarinda stopped and took her hand from his arm and let it hang as it had hung since she had first sat down upon coming into the house. Peter trembled under her touch and trembled more when he lost the feel of her hand upon his arm.

“Put your hand back!” he demanded. Clarinda put her hand back and her face broke into a weary smile. She even allowed herself to pity him in his fear.

“What do you fear, Peter?” she asked. “Where is your philosophy?” Her voice was full of sarcasm. “You needn’t fear me. I am not going to do you any harm. You needn’t fear for the child. I’m not going to do it any harm. That would be useless. If I should do you harm, you would be finished. You told me that when you should die you would be finished. I don’t want you to die, I want you to live. I want you to see your other woman, the kind you wanted to marry. The sort you dreamed of in your idle moments, in your office, where you built air castles and forgot the human factor.”

“I shall divorce you!” he broke in.

“Oh, no, you won’t. I won’t let you. You’ve no grounds. I believe one has to have grounds for that sort of thing. But you shall have relief. I am going away for a long time. Months

and months, perhaps years. But you will not forget me, Peter."

"Where are you going?" he asked with a tone of relief in his voice. "When?" he added.

"Are you anxious for me to go?" she asked. Peter nodded his head in assent. Again he wiped his forehead with his hand, but in his eyes there came a look of relief. He even looked at her. She seemed different. She seemed to him to have expanded, her figure was different, her face was more beautiful and her eyes had a strange look in them.

"Where are you going?" he asked again.

"In a few days I am going. Where I don't know. Europe I suppose. All broken, unhappy women go to Europe. They say they forget there. It must be the lights, the chairs on the boulevards. I may go to California. I may not. It makes no difference. You will tell lies about me and you will say the strain I have been under has been too great, that you are sorry that I've gone, and that you intend to join me in the fall or spring. But you do not. You will shake your head and look for sympathy and probably you will get it. You will lie manfully, Peter." Clarinda laughed. Peter wiped his forehead with his hand. It was wet.

"I shall be divorced!" he repeated.

“Because my health is broken with the strain. No, you won’t, Peter. You won’t be divorced. If you do I shall kill you. If you besmirch my good name—” Clarinda’s voice rose in anger. “I shall come back. It is easy to kill. It amounts to nothing. You should know, for you killed the thing that loved you. You killed a trust. It is worse to kill that than anything else. I didn’t die, I couldn’t die. More is the pity.”

“Clarinda!” Peter exclaimed.

“Listen, I have it all arranged. Tomorrow, or the day after. We shall go back to Father’s house. The lawyer will be there, he will read the will. Father’s things will be given to those whom he wished. You will sit there with a crease in your forehead and will look wise. You will acquiesce and wonder why he did not leave you more. Inside your heart will be hurt. You will not say anything, you will smile, and pretend to be very much surprised that he has left you anything at all. You will draw upon your philosophy, and maybe you will be comforted. I doubt that very much. It will end in a farce. Mother will groan, and feel hurt. I—I shall not care. After this is done I shall go away to Europe or California or some other place and you, Peter, will meet me next fall or spring. You will lie.”

“Clarinda!” Peter could not understand. He could not believe the person who talked was Clarinda. He looked at her as if to reassure his mind that it was really she. He could not think. His mind was in a turmoil. “The baby?” he asked.

“That is yours, you will raise it, you will lie to it, you will tell it of its mother, her beauty, her cleanness of spirit. You will lie to it as you have lied all your life. You will tell it that you are going to take it to its mother, and when it gets old enough you will lie to it again. You will blame me. But you will not tell the child the truth. You’ve not the fearlessness to do that. You will not tell it that this thing was your fault, you will not tell it that the greatest failure in your life was of your own making, you have not the temerity.”

“I shall tell the child,” he answered.

“Oh no you won’t. I know you, Peter. Even better than you know yourself. You are a coward, Peter, a wonderful coward. This part is finished, this chapter is done. You may as well go. It is of no avail to talk more. I will go with you to my mother’s tomorrow and we will listen to the will. Another farce. Good-bye, Peter. Would you like to kiss me good-bye? You might think of it afterwards, Peter. It might do you good.”

Peter arose from the divan. He looked at her squarely in the face. A shiver went down his back. He said nothing but walked to the door and opening it quietly as one does on the dead, he walked from the room and closed it even as gently behind him.

Clarinda listened to his footfall and it gradually grew more and more indistinct and then died out. A silence fell in the place. The dark became impenetrable, there was no sound. Clarinda gave a great sigh and leaned back among the cushions and closed her eyes.

IV

In the morning at nine, Clarinda's maid came into her room. Quietly she threw open the blinds and drew down the windows. She went from one place to another and picked up the various articles of clothing Clarinda had dropped upon the floor, a stocking, a pair of shoes, a skirt. When she had finished she turned towards the bed and saw Clarinda sitting up among the covers. Her hair streamed down about her shoulders and her eyes blazed like two great stars. Dark circles were under each of them, as if painted. The maid was startled. She came over to the side of the bed.

"Madame has not slept. Will Madame have a bath?" she asked with hesitation.

"No," answered Clarinda shortly.

"Shall the nurse bring the child?"

"No," she answered.

It had been the custom to bring the baby into the room in the morning. Clarinda always took it in her arms and would place it so it might play among the covers. It amused her. She always looked upon it as a phenomenon. She could not conceive this vital thing that scrab-

bled about, crawling from here to there was part of her flesh and blood, that she had brought it into the world. When she looked at it, she could not imagine it would grow into a man's estate and be a power for good or evil, as the fates might carve out for it, that it should be a force. It was called Peter.

"Will Madame dress?" asked the maid.

"What time is it?"

"Nine o'clock, Madame." The maid watched Clarinda carefully, as if she feared something. "Will you have your coffee now?"

"No," answered Clarinda.

She rose from the bed and the maid threw a garment of light filmy stuff about her. Clarinda advanced to the middle of the floor. The maid thought she wavered as she stood, as if she were uncertain of herself. She walked quickly towards her but Clarinda felt her approach and sank into a chair.

"I must talk," Clarinda said quickly. "Say something! Do something! Don't walk about the place so aimlessly. It doesn't matter what you say—say something!"

"You suffer, Madame," the maid said quickly. "You have not slept. Have you some terrible trouble?" said the maid stopping as if at a loss. Clarinda turned her burning eyes upon her. "I don't know what to say. I know

nothing, but I pity you, Madame, your eyes are so bright they scare me." The maid trembled. "You suffer."

"Yes, I suffer. I suffer horribly." Clarinda wrung her hands in despair. They dropped listlessly over the edge of the chair.

"From what, Madame? Why should you suffer? You have everything."

"I must talk. I've no one to talk to." Clarinda wept as she spoke and the great tears fell down her cheeks.

"Ah! Madame, I pity you, tell me. I will be discreet. I promise! I swear! It might do you good. It might spare you something. I might be able to help."

Clarinda arose and walked about the room. She went hastily from one end to the other. Her arms beat the air. Occasionally she brushed the tears from her cheeks. Her eyes were bright as they had been, like two burning stars.

"Listen, Tizzia!" she commanded.

"I am listening, Madame."

Clarinda increased her pace. She almost ran from one end of the place to the other. The filmy garment she wore trailed behind her in the wind she made. Her feet were bare and she spoke so rapidly she was almost incoherent.

"Can you imagine, to what a condition I

have fallen? I, Clarinda! It can't be true. It must be a horrible dream. He said I killed my father, the person I adored. It is not true. It is impossible. I loved him and I don't believe he is dead. I didn't go to his funeral. Peter says I killed him. Tizzia, I hate Peter!" and she turned and looked into the frightened face of the maid.

"Madame!" she exclaimed.

"Hush! I am talking. At last I can speak. Yes, I hate him. No one has ever hated as I hate. I even hate the child. He, Peter, said I would have killed it. I would have. I knew this house meant disaster. The others who lived in it met disaster. The man died and his wife and his children are in the world—starving. I knew it meant disaster. I begged Peter not to bring me here."

"You will be divorced, Madame?"

Clarinda straightened herself up. Her figure seemed to add height. She laughed aloud. The tones of her voice rattled in her throat, and with a struggle she regained herself.

"No," she said slowly, each word gathering strength, "I will not be divorced."

"Probably Madame will go away," Tizzia answered timidly.

"Did you ever hate, Tizzia? Did you ever

hate? Hate so that murder entered your heart, so that it became an obsession?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Tizzia with fright in her voice.

"That is not so bad. Murder is not so bad. For the thing you kill, dies. It stops. Think of me, my position. It is more terrible than if I had been murdered. I cannot die. I must live. Instead of being dead. I must go to my father's house. I must sit and listen to his will. I must appear broken and distraught. I must do these things, and in my heart I shall fear none of them. I am glad he is dead. I am glad I saw him die. Did you ever see anyone die? It is wonderful. You should have seen his frightened old face. You should have seen his hands, the blood going from them, drying up. The veins stood out, and they seemed to pulsate. His face was first white, but when I spoke to him, it grew gray. His eyes lost their luster. His old body wrapped in a great cover shrank from me. It cried out for pity. I did not pity. I was amused. He was so pathetic, so frightened, then he gave a great convulsion and he dropped limp, and he was still. His body gradually slipped down and down until it lay a huddled mass of nothing on the floor. I laughed." Clarinda's voice stuck in her throat. A convulsion passed over

her face, and she was fast becoming hysterical. She stopped.

“You must calm yourself, Madame. It is necessary. Mr. Thorbald will come. It would be bad for him to see you like this.”

“He will not come. He does not dare. He is afraid. He is a coward, Tizzia. Mr. Thorbald lies.” Clarinda clenched her hands. They pained her.

“Madame must collect herself. Madame doesn’t know what she says. It is terrible to hear, Madame!” Tizzia exclaimed quickly. Her face had become ashen with fear.

“I know what I say, Tizzia. I know only too well. I suffer so. I can’t understand why this should have come to me. I’ve tried so hard to do the things I thought were right. I’ve failed. He told me I had failed. He was right. I have failed miserably.”

A gong rang downstairs and the sound reverberated throughout the house. It struck Clarinda’s ear as if it would break the drums. Clarinda shivered.

“I must go,” she said. “I must enter the car with Peter. I must get out of the house and sit beside him. I must show sympathetic interest. They will force me to listen and be impressed with the things they say. I will do it. I will finish the story. I shall not weep.”

Hastily with the aid of the maid, Clarinda dressed herself, and did it with meticulous care. She charged the maid with lack of attention, and time after time, she took her hair down and had it re-arranged as often. It never suited her. After she had finished and had looked into the glass that hung from the ceiling to the floor, she went from the room out upon the landing, and on down the stairs to the hall, where Peter was waiting for her. He turned his eyes towards her as he heard her come. He was filled with apprehension, and a slight tremor shook his body, his heart stood still. Clarinda bowed to him as she passed, but said nothing. He likewise did not speak but with a slight bow he opened the door for her to pass out. The footman at the car, that stood at the bottom of the steps, held the door open and they entered.

At a sign from Peter the car moved slowly out of the garden, and then went more rapidly down the street. In a few moments it drew up in front of the house of her late father. Again the footman opened the door and offered his arm to aid her but she paid no attention to him, and quickly went into the house.

In the library to the right of the main entrance she found her mother sitting in gloomy

silence. Clarinda spoke to her and found herself a seat some distance from her where she sat in a deep shadow. There was no sound. Peter sought to sit close to her, but Clarinda turned her eyes upon him and he went away and sat quite near her mother. Clarinda was alone in her portion of the room. She seemed to be set apart, as if she had nothing to do with the affair.

At a large table especially arranged sat a man, clothed in black like an undertaker. His head was large, his forehead protruded, and upon his nose rested a pair of glasses over which he looked. His air was pompous, and he seemed oppressed with his knowledge. To Clarinda he looked foolish. Before him upon the table lay a mass of papers, documents of parchment, and upon the floor propped up by the legs of his chair, stood portentous bags of leather with silver clasps. Impressive bits of red string lay among the documents. Clarinda looked at him, for he amused her. He looked so false, so pretentious, so unnecessary. She watched him move. He was being paid for his pantomime, and his pay would be in proportion to the bulge of his forehead.

After he had bowed to all those present, and spoken to each by his proper name, he cleared his throat. Then he wiped his forehead with a

huge white handkerchief, which he placed on the table beside him. It looked like a mountain with peaks and turrents of intense white. To Clarinda it seemed part of his pretensions.

Accordingly, having duly impressed his hearers, he picked up a thick document, which was folded many times. Carefully he pressed out each crease. With slow precision he arose from the chair he occupied, and looked at the company over his glasses and read.

For a long time his voice went on monotonously. There was no inflection; he might have been reading to a court. He only stopped now and then to glance at Clarinda's mother, at Peter, or at Clarinda. It seemed to Clarinda he would never finish, as if he would go on forever. Eventually the final sheet of the document was turned and he stopped as if he were an actor and waited for applause. When it did not come, he appeared disappointed.

Clarinda gathered nothing from the reading of the will. Peter smiled at the amount he received, and he was pleased. Peter loved money. Clarinda's mother knew equally as much as Clarinda. She was entirely in the dark. They both knew they had been left something, but neither knew just how much or what.

"A wonderful will," said the lawyer. "Fair, comprehensive, unbreakable."

Clarinda arose from her chair. She walked over to the table and picked up the will from among the other papers.

“What do I have under this will?” she asked.

“Your father has treated you magnificently,” the lawyer replied.

“I didn’t ask that,” she said tersely.

The man picked up the will, quickly turned over a few of the pages. “You will find,” he said, reading carefully with the same lack of intonations, “under paragraph one, section A, page five and upon the subsequent page. ‘I hereby leave and bequeath to my beloved daughter the sum of three hundred thousand dollars, free of all tax.’ In section B, page six, paragraph five, you will find that this sum of money has been left in trust. You are to be free of any control of this money, and at your death, should you leave any children, they shall come into your share when they shall have attained the age of thirty-five. A fine proviso,” he added. “Per capita and not per stirpes. This refers to your mother’s portion.”

“Why that?” asked Clarinda.

He did not answer Clarinda’s question. “You will find that this money is free from any supervision by your husband and the increment thereof shall be paid to you by your said trustees.” He added again, “A fine proviso.”

“Who are the trustees?” asked Clarinda.

“I have the honor of being one of them, and the Safety and Guarantee Trust Company is the other.”

“Is Peter’s left in trust?” she asked.

“Oh no,” he replied, with a look of astonishment. “Men as a rule do not need trustees. They have more experience.”

“I just wanted to know.” Clarinda’s voice carried a peculiar tone. The lawyer looked at her searchingly. Peter turned his eyes towards her. Her mother sat in the same gloom and the same lack of understanding of what was taking place. Her mind only grasped the idea that in some way she was provided for, that this will had made her independent. Through her mind fled visions of what she would do, she even thought she would like to travel.

“That is all?” asked Clarinda, as she moved away from the table after laying the will upon it.

“I believe so,” answered the lawyer. Apparently not quite certain of himself. Clarinda’s manner broke in upon his usual method of carrying forward proceedings of the kind. He was upset, he could not exactly define why.

Clarinda bowed to him and nodded her head to her mother. She went out of the room and

left them still sitting. Her mother was non-plussed. Peter did not go after her.

Clarinda entered the car, and ordered the driver to take her back home.

V

As the car left the front of the house, after the reading of the will, it went down the roadway to the street. At the lodge gates stood the old keeper who had been there many years. He it was who smiled and swept the clean gravel with his cap the day she had been married. He bowed again in the same way and his hat touched the clean gravel again as she went by. He smiled again, but now his smile seemed to be more sinister; it carried, as Clarinda looked at him, more terrible futility with it than it had at the former time.

Clarinda trembled as she huddled back in her seat of the car. She tried to blot him out from her mind, but his old face clung. He gave her more occasion for thought, but soon he was gone. The car went rapidly on its way, and it was only a few moments until it stopped in front of the place Peter called home.

Clarinda got out of the car and went hurriedly into the house, straight through the hall. She saw nothing, not even the servants who stood clustered about. They winked at one another and nodded their heads knowingly.

In some manner they sensed with that peculiar intuition which hangs about servants that they were on the brink of a tragedy, the household, like many they had seen before, was disrupted—gone. Already they were turning over in their minds the finding of service elsewhere. Truthfully they hated the thought of the new applications they would have to file. It bothered them. The door boy, the man in buttons who handed the silver tray for the cards of the visitors, the housekeeper, all of them even to the scullery maid, were disgruntled. They liked the place. The stealings were easy and there was very little work to do.

Mrs. Caws stood close to the entrance like a bird of prey. She watched with eager eyes everything that happened. She, too, thought of the next place where she could get employment, and a smile crossed her lips. It was bitter, hard, and seemed full of anticipation. She loved disaster to come to such as Clarinda and Peter. It pleased her that people of the kind that Clarinda and Peter represented should go down from their great estate. She, in her narrow soul hated the rich, although it was from the rich that she was able to live.

Clarinda did not see her any more than she had seen the rest of them. She hastened to her room and after she had entered she closed

the door tightly behind her. Then quickly she rang the bell that stood upon a table near the divan. The maid entered, her face was drawn, there were evidences of tears upon it, her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were red.

“Madame, did you ring?” she asked.

Clarinda nodded her head. Presently she sat down upon the divan. Carefully she placed herself in its corner and tucked her body into the cushions and after removing her hat, she laid her head wearily back. A sigh left her lips, and it was so deep that it seemed to come from the depths of her heart. Her face was set, there was no sign of weakening. A bitter look had come into her eyes. The usual beautiful blue of them had died. They had become gray. A deep—dark gray.

After a long period of silence she said shortly as if speaking to herself, “That is over.”

“What is over, Madame?”

“Tizzia,” she continued, “after I am gone—after all this horrible life that I’ve had to lead is over, I want you to think of me, not as you see me now, but as you knew me when you first came into this place. When you do think of me, you must not forget that I feared the place. I don’t know why, but I did fear it.”

“Yes, Madame,” answered Tizzia. “I shall

be happy to do so. You are going away?" she ventured timidly.

Clarinda looked at her as if appraising her, as if trying to decide whether she asked questions from interest in her, or only from the spirit of inquisitiveness. The maid stood in front of her. Her whole being to Clarinda seemed to betoken sorrow at her condition, and it gave Clarinda confidence.

"You know," Clarinda went on. She spoke slowly thinking deeply of every word she uttered. "I don't trust you. I don't know if your apparent interest is from curiosity or just from the liking you have for other people's sorrows."

"Ah, Madame! I am sorry you said that!" she broke in quickly. "I don't want your confidence—unless Madame feels I am not just curious. I sympathize with you, Madame, deeply. I've seen something of life, too, Madame, I, too, am a woman. I—"

Clarinda arose from the divan, and she strode about the room. She took great steps, as if in their length she could find relief.

Presently, she spoke quickly, not stopping her march. "I don't care. I don't care if you listen to me from curiosity or from real sympathy. I must talk to someone. It might as well be you. I've no one in the world to turn

to. You don't know the desperateness of such a situation. The meanest people in the world usually have someone. Sit down there!" she commanded.

"I would rather stand, please, Madame."

"Sit down!"

Tizzia sat down. She placed her body upon the extreme edge of the chair. Clarinda still walked. She spoke loudly, without intermitence, and her words fell over one another, yet she appeared to think of each word as she uttered it. The maid listened and followed as best she could. At times the maid wept. At other times she trembled with fear, then again she thought Clarinda would drop from exhaustion. It seemed to her that she ran instead of walked from one end of the room to the other.

"I've thought it all out, Tizzia! I've thought it all out! Last night I didn't sleep. I walked this room and my bedroom all night. I heard you come along the hall. I waited for you to come. It seemed to me as if it were years—years and years! You would be surprised how long it is from daylight to daylight, when you are waiting for some one. The hours are so long. The time goes so slowly. I don't know how I lived through those hours. It was terrible, but it is over, it is gone! I've done my duty today. I've heard the will read, I am rich.

I am under the domination of a little man and a great Trust Company.” Clarinda laughed. “I’ve three hundred thousand dollars, and when my mother dies, I shall have hundreds of thousands more. After I am dead, it goes to the child. He will be rich. Isn’t that splendid for him?” Clarinda’s voice rang with bitter sarcasm. For a moment she stopped in her march and stood in front of Tizzia. “Are you listening, Tizzia?” she asked. Tizzia nodded her head in assent.

“I am going away. Yes, Tizzia, I am going away. I am going to know an entirely different life. I am going to have lovers. I shall sell myself to the highest bidder—to some man who will buy my body with his filthy dollars. I shall find out whether this creature, man, places more value upon a woman whom he actually buys at so much per pound, than upon the woman who comes to him with love in her heart. Yes, I shall know the world! I shall know. I shall go away.” Clarinda’s eyes narrowed. She went on slowly. Tizzia did not move from the edge of her chair.

“Peter, the lovely, gracious, Peter—the successful Peter, the Peter whom my father patted upon the back and told how wonderful he was—wonderful, because he could filch a few more dollars than another man. He shall know

how I am doing. He shall be told, by me, of every step I take. He shall feel the degradation to which I shall fall—he, this lovely Peter, thinks because I am a woman—I shall weaken. He thinks no woman can stand up against the force projected by man. This wonderful person thinks that I being a woman should sue for pity, that in the end, I will come back to him, grovel at his feet and ask him to give me respectability. Men think this sort of thing because a woman has borne him a child. Poor, foolish creature! I am going to destroy myself not with a knife, nor a pistol, nor with poison. But I am going to destroy myself—kill all those finer things which are of me. I am going to the dregs. I shall suffer. O! I shall suffer miserably. I hate the touch of men, Tizzia! But I am going to teach myself to bear it.”

Clarinda stopped as if for breath. She still walked up and down the room at a furious pace.

“O! Madame, you can’t! You don’t know what you say,” Tizzia broke in, and there were tears in her voice.

“O, yes, I do. I know exactly what I say. More’s the pity,” Clarinda answered quickly. “Can you imagine me in a brothel? It is laughable. But I am going. I am going to

have a lover. I want a lover. I've always wanted a lover. When I married I thought that was what I was getting. I did not. But now I shall have one. It will be wonderful to give oneself to a lover—a man! Probably I shall get one who has committed a great crime. We shall always live in fear of the police. Probably he may have killed some one for a lot of money. When I meet him he will have great piles of bills, and we will sneak out at night and spend it—always in fear. He will beat me. He will get drunk and be brutal. But he will be a man! And after all it may happen I shall learn to love him.” Clarinda laughed. Her laugh scared Tizzia, even more than her words. Tizzia did not believe she meant what she said. But when she laughed she thought it might be true. That she would do as she said.

Clarinda continued: “And this man—this criminal with whom I shall live, to whom I shall give my body, he will probably desert me when I am getting the least bit old. I will feel this age coming upon me, then I shall paint my face. I will fight age. I shall learn how it is done. Every year that comes upon me will make me suffer more—for I know men only love youth. They hate age. They want only the young. But that will be a long way off. I am only twenty-three! It might happen that this

lover of mine, kills me in one of his drunken fits. What a glorious heritage to leave Peter's boy. His mother killed in a brothel by a criminal, a murderer. What a headline for the newspapers. *Mrs. Clarinda Thorbald, the wife of Mr. Peter Thorbald the successful banker, murdered in a brothel.* I hope it happens. It would be a glorious end to a great career. O, it is wonderful!"

Clarinda walked over to the window, and said nothing further. She appeared to have talked herself out. A great calm descended upon her. Tizzia arose from her chair. She did not know what to do. She stood uncertainly in the middle of the room. Clarinda heard her as she moved. She turned.

"You will pack my things, Tizzia. Put all my jewelry in the bags. It is foolish to go without anything. That is quixotic. I must take my money, too. It is easier to get a lover with money than without."

"You will change your mind about the rest, Madame. You are too good to do the horrible things you say. Madame is excited. When you have thought the matter over you will think again."

Clarinda looked at Tizzia. "How little you know me," she said. Her voice was weary. Tizzia could barely hear what she said. "How

little everybody knows me. How different it might have been if Peter had known me. I regret Peter, for once I loved him. He was the one great thing in my life, but he has died.”

“The child, Madame?”

“It belongs to Peter. I only brought it into the world. It is only my flesh and blood. It amounts to nothing. I wish it joy. I hate it! I could have loved it madly. But that, too, is dead.”

Tizzia went into the other room. She left Clarinda and began to put the things she wanted into the various bags. Lovingly she took down from the closets the many dresses Clarinda had loved. With delicate touch she folded each garment and placed it in the great trunks. She rang a bell and ordered more trunks brought into the room. The man who brought them ventured to ask what they were for. Was Madame going away? Tizzia did not answer. She wept incessantly. The tears fell from her cheeks and spotted the delicate fabrics.

Clarinda left alone threw herself down upon the divan. Time went by. The clock ticked as if nothing was taking place—as if the old life was just the same, as if happiness had not left the house.

Finally speaking to herself, she said: "It must come. Why not now?"

She arose from the divan, went out of the door leading to the rooms in which Peter lived. Quietly she opened the door. Over at a table she saw Peter. He was writing. His head was bent and he was absorbed in his task. His pen flew with rapidity. He did not hear her come in, nor did he hear the door close behind her. She spoke and Peter jumped from his seat. His face was pale, drawn, distorted. His brow she saw was covered with perspiration. As he moved, he wiped his forehead with his hand. He stood and stared at her.

Clarinda stood upon the opposite side of the table. She looked down upon him. As he jumped from his seat, he stood as if paralyzed. He did not seem able to move.

"Goodbye, Peter." There was extreme sorrow in her voice. It quavered and trembled as she spoke.

"You are going?" he asked timidly.

"Yes, it is done. I have failed you. I am sorry. It was so full of promise, Peter. Our life could have been happy. But I have failed."

"You cannot! You cannot!" His hands shook. The tears fell down his cheeks unresisted by him. His knees weakened under him. He fell back into his chair and buried his head

in his hands upon the table. His great body shook with intense grief, and Clarinda pitied him, but her mind did not change.

“I am going, Peter. I am going away now, today. The maid is packing for me. Goodbye Peter.”

Peter moaned. “No—no—no! I can’t bear it! You can’t go! I won’t let you! It is impossible!”

“It is done, Peter.”

Clarinda turned and went slowly towards the door. Her hand fell gently upon the knob. Quietly she opened it. As Peter saw her go, he sprang from his chair. He held his arms outstretched towards her. The door came open slowly. Quietly Clarinda passed from the room, and the door closed softly behind her.

Peter screamed in his anguish. His soul was torn and he fell inert upon the floor. The dark took him, and his eyes closed.

STAGE THREE

Dear Peter:

I knew it would come. But I wished to put it off until the chance for a change was impossible. I've waited years for the time. I had planned in my mind how I should do this thing I am about to do, with infinite care. Each step was watched and taken even as the blind walk, even when I left the house I intended to do this thing.

I wonder if you have ever read, "The Woman in White"? And if in the reading you remember Count Fosco? You know he is the only fat villain in any book. One thing he did I want to draw to your mind. It is the most trivial thing in the whole book. You know, if you have read the book, that after he was discovered and the things he had done were set before him in all their hideousness, he sat down and wrote his confessions. They covered innumerable sheets. The description by Collins of how he gradually became buried in the pages is wonderfully drawn. You could see him, Fosco, with the perspiration pouring down his fat face, and his hand holding the pen flying over the sheets. I shall be Fosco buried in sheets. That will, however, be my only likeness

to him, for I do not consider myself a villain. I am merely a woman.

Let's see. This is a very difficult task. I do not know where to begin. Shall I start at this end? Or shall I take it up from the time I left the house? Our house. I was horribly alone. You will never understand how poignantly alone I was; but that is neither here nor there.

I've decided, even in the writing of these first lines where I shall begin. I am going to start with the now and go back. That is I mean to, but I do not promise to keep it up. It is a long story—a miserable history. I've sought for breaks in it, but I've discovered none. Remember, Peter, I am not sorry. I feel precisely as I did about the whole matter, as I did the day I walked from the house. I've not relented, even at this late date. I am not sorry; I do not regret. I repeat this statement in order that it may be impressed clearly upon your mind. I don't want you to think I am pleading for pity. I am not. I neither crave your sympathy nor your change of feeling. I hope you get this point exactly.

How time flies. You are sixty-two. I am forty-eight. We are both going down the hill, and we are going down alone. It might have been otherwise. The boy is twenty-three. I saw him when he was fifteen. I saw him again

when he was twenty, and again when he was twenty-one. I went where he was out of idle curiosity. I wanted to see what this thing of my flesh and blood had grown into. I was pleased and I was not. I thought he ought to have looked better. I wondered what he would have been under my influence, and had had the advantage of a mother's love. My friends tell me that a boy needs this sort of thing to lift him over the hard places. Curiously enough I didn't want to speak to him. I didn't long to hold him in my arms, nor did I feel any desire to have him know me. I wonder whether that is normal. Most mothers, I suppose, would have gone to him and taken him in their arms, and begged him in a melodramatic way for his love. I desired no such thing. It may be that my life has been confused. I don't know. However, that is neither here nor there. When I left you he was buried. I always looked upon him as a disgrace. He was not in my mind purely born. He was my stigma. So, he is of me and not of me. I will speak of him no more.

I look back upon my life as a series of developments. First, my youth—full of hope, gay, protected, luxurious, a timid child with no conception of life, a thing raised untutored, pushed into a willing marriage. I wanted to marry you. It was a consuming desire upon my part.

I hoped so and I loved so. I thought you were wonderful. It gave me a thrill when you came home. I looked upon you as a super-man—unconquerable. Then gradually the veil was rent asunder. You did the tearing and you did it thoroughly. You destroyed me. I, however, felt it come and I tried hard to fight it out. My aim was to conquer the thing so that you and I, Peter, should lead an ideal existence—that we should have children, that love should radiate about us, like a glorious sun, on a glorious summer day. You killed this. You wanted money, success—futile, necessary money.

Remember, Peter, I don't blame you for all the misfortune, as I may have been equally at fault. I couldn't advance as rapidly as you did. I suppose it arose from the fact that I wanted you and not the world. I wanted children, and I wanted a home. I wanted to be separated from the frivolities of life. I wanted the burden of your happiness.

It may have been my fault in that I wanted to have you believe that in me and in me alone was the lodestar of all your hopes. In the development of that part of me, with no end of thought, I failed. I've always failed. I can't understand why, but the fact remains.

I remember—it was a long time ago, many, many years. With what perturbation I was

filled that first time you went away without kissing me goodbye. That was a tiny omission, but it was an interstice. Then I knew it came out of the blue. I knew I was slipping, that outside things were grasping you, and I sensed this thing clearly. Then I fought—I fought to recover, but although I fought I lost. I lost more and more. Each losing infinitely small. I mean each slip towards the disintegration; but to me these slips were monumental. I developed. I passed in a few short moments into another stage.

My second stage. I wonder as I write this whether you will read it and whether if you do you will be able to understand what I want to convey to you. Sometimes as I read what I write I think I may have missed the point.

In my second stage, I awoke from a poor bedraggled, dispirited woman. I became mad. I lost all sense of proportion. I magnified things you had done to me into things without proper ratios. I even had the temerity to gloat while my Father died. This was a curious experience. I looked back upon it with wonder. I can't understand exactly how it could have happened. I can't exactly define my frame of mind. It must have arisen because I blamed him, even as much as I did you, for the condition in which I found myself.

Of course, my Mother was a negligible quantity in my life. And from the things I have learned concerning her since her death, her sorrow over the tragedies that surrounded her life were but passing affairs which did not seem in any way to approach her. She seemed to sense nothing except her material side. Everything was cast from her as a snake sheds its skin. From her I received life and from her I got nothing except life.

It was different in the case of my Father. He loved me, and I know now as I look back that he adored me. His one ambition in life was to make existence for me as free from all source of worry as the human can. But he failed, and he failed because his perspective was bad. He didn't understand the longings of a real woman. He knew the world from a man's point of view. There he stopped. He knew nothing of it from a love's point of view. He loved, but he loved materially. I asked him once whether he loved Mother as much as when he married her. He could not answer. He knew his love had left her and centered about his own success, which meant money and position—the flattery of men.

I am hastening these two developments because I want to tell you of the third stage of my life—the third development, and what it

has cost me, how I arrived at this stage at which I find myself and what if anything I have gained by my conduct towards you.

There is a curious thing comes to my mind. It may not strike you exactly as it does me. But I am going to mention it for the reason that it interests me. You, Peter, even today, are the only thing in life as far as I am concerned, and it took the greatest amount of determination to withstand the temptation which assailed me.

Many times in the past twenty-odd years I have gotten out of my bed with the firm determination to come back to you. To say that probably after all I was wrong, that I laid too much stress upon the condition in which I found myself. You know, or probably you have not thought it out—that once a woman gives herself to a man, once she has borne him children, her whole heart, her whole life is wrapped up in the one experience. Women are not like men. They are monogamous. There is barely a woman in the world who has given herself to one man, and afterwards goes through a divorce court or leaves him, that at times she does not feel within herself an urge that is nearly unconquerable to go back to that man. Women re-marry and they live in what is supposed to be contentment, but in their hearts there is no contentment.

You will never know the tugs I have had or the strength I have used to carry out this thing to its bitter end, but I was certain to do this.

Eight years after I had gone from the house, I stood for hours outside the wall. I looked through the bars of the gate. I looked upon the garden. There was a light in the room in which you had placed the divan—the dear old divan, with the soft light burning behind it. I stood for hours on a clear night. The moon shone through the trees, and I could see the flowers. I could even make out the fountain around which we had walked and you had told me of what you had done during the day. This only happened once—a walk such as this. What joy that walk gave me. I feel it even now. The great door was open. The light beckoned to me. It invited me to come. It seemed to say, “Enter, and you will be forgiven. Love waits for you.” I shook with fear. For I was afraid that I might weaken.

I walked furiously up and down the pavement. My eyes were pinned upon that light, and except for the light that fled through the front doors everything else was dark. Nowhere was there a single light except in that one room. I thought I could see you in it. I wondered whether you were happy. I didn’t believe you were. Somehow I saw you much

changed. You were gray. Your shoulders were not full. You seemed to me to be stooped. I wondered if I went in how you would greet me. I was afraid.

It was late when I left. Midnight. The light still burned. It struck me as curious. I wondered why this was so. After I went away, I knew I had made a mistake. I should have gone in to you. I should have walked up to that little room and sat myself down upon the divan, and if you were not there I should have waited. I believe now and I believed then that you would have taken me in your arms and comforted me. You would not have berated me. You didn't know how lonely I had been. But, Peter, I failed you. You told me so.

I left as I say, at midnight. I walked past my father's house. Some one was laughing in there. New people. People who had children. Life. The lights were all lit. It looked so gay. I believe I wept. A man came out upon the porch. I could see him from the lodge gates. He put out his hand as if to see if it rained. He did not see the moon. I thought that so funny. He went back again, closed the door and after sometime the lights began to go down one by one, and finally the house became dark. It was so peaceful. And I was so unhappy. So lacking in peace.

I thought of all that I had done in that old

house. I saw my early life again. I felt its happiness creep over me. I felt my father at my side. I saw him stand by me. I could almost feel the grasp of his hand. His breath fanned my cheek. And it seemed to me he whispered in my ear. He said with such depth in his voice, "I forgive you Clarinda. I pity you. Go back." The thing became so vivid to me, that I turned and ran. I don't know how far I ran; but I ran until a man stopped me. He said, "Why do you run? Are you scared? Has anything happened to you?"

I fled from him. I ran further until I was nearly dropping with exhaustion, then I stopped. I was far from your house. Far down in the city. It was terrible to me. Then I walked rapidly. It was getting late. A bell in a tower near by struck two.

I have never been back since. That happened years ago. But even although it happened years ago, it is as fresh in my mind as if it took place yesterday. I conquered myself. I didn't go back to you. My second development had taken place. My second stage had been gone through with. I was different. I was no more the Clarinda you married. My old self had died. You would not have loved me any more. It would have been impossible.

It is night, Peter. Good-night.

C.

Dear Peter:

I am continuing the letter I wrote you some-time ago. Of course, I am sending you these as a compilation. They are not in series; for if I should do that you would lose the trend. Probably you would become bored and when these letters came from time to time, you might throw them in the waste basket. It is impossible for me to judge your frame of mind from this distance after all these years. I cannot judge into what you have developed.

However, the first part is finished and the second part is also done with. This is the third part. The drawing of the thing to a conclusion—a finishing of it all. And after this is done, I shall sit down by my window and look out upon the passing world and wonder how long I shall live. How soon I shall have peace—a thing I have never had, or ever known.

I remember the day I left. It was cruel. You recollect the sky. The sun did not shine. The flowers in the garden as I went seemed to tuck their heads down under their leaves as if seeking protection from the cold. It was not cold. It was raining. It was warm.

I entered the car. I closed the door by my-

self. It appeared to me as if some one was closing me in some place, just as if I were being penned in a great prison, from which I should never come out. I shivered, Peter.

The last face I saw was that of Tizzia who stood at one of the windows. The tears were running down her face. Frantically she waved her hand to me, and then she was gone. It was all gone—the house, you and my happiness.

I wonder if Tizzia told you of my last conversation with her—the threats I made of the things I should do. I often think of that conversation and the stress I was under at the time. Funny as it may appear to you I did those things. I went forth from you—from all the things I thought were right and good.

You should have seen the man. I met him a short time after I left. His name was Bill—Slippery Bill, he was called. A vicious man. A drunkard of the most horrible kind. His mind was a morass of immorality. His sense of humor was beating a woman. He had killed one person, and when he was drunk he bragged to me and described how his victim had moaned and begged. He loved to tell me of the thing he killed. Of course, it was a woman. He was just a man—a coward.

Bill was a thief—a second-story man. One who lies in wait until a house is empty and

then goes in safely. When he would steal he would come to me in the hovel we lived in and throw the things he had got on the table, and gloat on them, and brag about the ease with which he did this sort of thing. After that he would get drunk. For days and weeks he was in this condition. He amused me. He was so futile. His operations so foolish. With half the effort he could have made a good living.

Bill hated work. He wanted to live in what he called ease. Poor foolish Bill! He feared everything. The crack of a twig, the sound of the wind, a strange footstep. It was always the law coming for him. The police! He even feared me and sometimes in his frenzy of fear he would beat me. He thought I might betray him. It amused me. His fear was queer. I laughed at it when he was gone on one of his missions.

I met this creature not long after I had gone from you. I went down into the depths of shame and poverty. I lived in one tiny room. Around me was a host of queer furtive people who lived from day to day—seeking always something that might keep them until the morrow. It was sad, but it was interesting. I went to their haunts. I soon became known to them. I even acquired their furtive habits. I appeared to be seeking like they, the things that

would keep me until the next day. Sometimes even in their extreme poverty they laughed. I would pretend that I had a good night. That I had seen some man who gave me part of what he had and I would give to them. A dollar now and then. Once I gave a poor old man, who had lived in his horrors for years, a five-dollar bill. You should have seen him. He became my shadow. There was no thankfulness in his manner. He thought he could get more. I found him in my room, going through my things. He found nothing. I took care of that. I cursed him for his temerity. He shrank out of the place, but he came back, for he hoped.

I came across Bill only four weeks after I left you. It was a short time after I took the miserable room in this quarter of this city. What city doesn't make any difference. But it was not so far from you that I couldn't watch you and what you did.

You should have seen the dive—dirt, ill-smelling, horrible. A ragged crew came and went. I entered, and I was poorly dressed—that is I had on the kind of finery of the people of the class I tried to identify myself with. I looked the part. I sat at one of the broken-down tables—filthy with stale beer and smeared with old pieces of cheese. Oh, how it smelt!

Bill was standing at the bar. He was par-

tially drunk. He turned, as I sat down, and he saw me. A curious light went over his face, and I knew here was the man! The man who should teach me whether men loved women from their pound value or from love.

Drunkenly he walked over to the table and leaned his great bony knuckles upon it. He didn't take off his hat. He looked at me. Even though I was dressed so badly, I was beautiful.

He spoke to me, I nodded my head. He ordered a glass of beer for me. He drank a concoction which he called whiskey. He was terribly dirty. Then he sat down. I looked at him. Rarely have I seen such a repulsive creature as he was. A great head covered with long shaggy hair, that curled in a mass. His eyes were blue—a deep blue. In them one could see the depths of depravity he had sunk to. His mouth was weak and sloppy, but his chin, covered with a few days' beard, was strong. He looked brutal. And, Peter, he was brutal.

“Where are you from?” he asked.

“Nowhere,” I replied. I drank a little of the beer. He swallowed the drink he had before him at a gulp. He appeared to throw it down his throat. I noticed that none of the muscles either contracted or expanded with the effort.

“Who are you?” he asked.

"No one," I replied.

"Where do you live?" he persisted.

I turned from him and arose from the table and left him staring after me. I knew he would follow. He did. We went out of the place together.

"My wife is dead," he said.

"Well?" I answered.

"I want another."

We stood outside of the door upon the pavement. In the light that came through the dirty windows. I moved away from him.

That was the beginning of the life I led with him. It was a curious sort of thing. He began to love me. He sought me out everywhere I went. There were many others. But Bill interested me more than any other man I met.

You should have heard him the night we walked together down one of the poorest streets in the city. He turned every few moments and looked back. He always walked near the walls of the buildings, for he told me that he was afraid. He knew he was suspected for all kinds of crimes.

He called me Magdalen. Bill had a slice of poetry in his make-up, and he reasoned well. He told me he loved me. He would even go straight for me. He would never drink again.

He got drunk that night. I wouldn't go with him. Bill was a liar like most men.

A long time went by. We met every night—in all kinds of places. All of them as dirty as the first. It ended by my going with him.

It happened one night we walked to the park. It was late. All the grog shops had closed. It was long after one o'clock. We sat upon a bench together. Bill was sober. He had washed. It was dreadfully dark. It was curious the feeling of disgust I had for the man; yet for some unaccountable reason I was attracted to him. I listened to him as he spoke. I compared his protestations with yours. His were stronger. Bill was only the offspring of the gutter. After a while as he went on he thrilled me. When he unbended his crooked figure and shook the mass of hair on his head, I wondered at the man. Women, Peter, are curious—even more curious than men. Underneath they love the cave man. They like strength and brutality. In this part of my life when I see with what insane cruelty this class of people beat and bruise their women, I wonder at them. But they do not leave—they weep, but they stay.

You should have heard him as he stood before me and looked at me the best he could in the dark. I could see his eyes flash.

I remember each word he spoke, as if it were yesterday. Yet Bill has been dead years and years, and he died in jail.

“You are different, Magdalen. I don’t understand you. I don’t care about that. I only know you came into my life. You are here. The first night I saw you, although I was drunk, I knew you were my woman. I don’t care where you came from, nor who you are. I love you, Magdalen. I would do anything for you. How long it has been since you came into this part of the world, makes no difference to me. I don’t know if you have ever loved before. I suppose you have. All women love at sometime. You don’t know what real love means. I love you—I want you. I am going to have you. It is funny, I never spoke to any women as I do to you. You seem to make me different. I’ve lost my strength; it has died in me. If you were like the rest I should take you. I would not ask. I would make you do as I want. But I cannot. That is the thing I don’t understand. I am afraid of you. Why?”

I whispered, “Yes, Bill.”

Women are curious. It seems as if they are forced to listen to men when they begin to lay before them what they term their hearts. Mostly it is the animal in them. They wish to propagate.

He went on as if I had not interrupted him. "Magdalen, I wonder if you know that the love of a man such as I am, is different from other kinds. We never select from personal advantage. It is more the man. The spirit of a beast. We want. We want physically. I have thought of you a great deal. And I can't understand what it is in you that makes me look at you differently from the women I have been thrown with, but the difference is there. I don't believe that you belong to the people you pretend you do. There is something behind. You eat differently. Your fingers are different. Your skin is different. You are beautiful. The people with whom I have always gone are only beautiful in their youth. They have the bloom and that is all. It soon dies. It may be the conditions surrounding them that causes this sort of thing. Tell me where you came from? Why are you here?"

"I won't tell you that. I am here. That is enough. Misfortune has placed me here. I like it. I am going to stay."

"Then you love me. Is that the reason you stay?" He shook with emotion and walked up and down in the dark in front of me.

I was terribly attracted. He was a brute, but he was a man after all. He had been unfortunate. And yet I don't think that exactly

covers what I mean. I never asked him from where he had come, or by what fatality he had sunk so low. Bill was the dregs.

“May I kiss you?” he asked.

Peter, I could not—I could not! And yet I knew in the end it would happen. I knew as I looked at this creature that to him I would be in name a wife. I trembled with fear. I hated it dreadfully. Every fiber in my body recoiled from any sort of personal contact with him. I wondered whether I would bear him children. I wondered whether he would beat me tomorrow or the day after. I knew he would. He did. Not then, but soon. It was queer, Peter, that after it happened—I mean after I took up life with him. Although he beat me, he did not kill the thing in me that you did. He always wept, when he got sober, and his contrition was wonderful. Unfortunately this did not deter him from beating me later. I think underneath that even though I thought about it all the time I loved him. How do you suppose that came about? I don’t know. Some people say a woman loves but once. Yet, here I was loving two distinct persons. And those persons so diametrically opposed.

It did happen. He kissed me. It was in the park in exactly the same place he had asked me before. He did not ask me. He took me in

his arms. I struggled. I fought. I knew it was the end. I anticipated it was coming. I didn't go with him into the park for weeks and weeks; yet he asked me to go innumerable times. At last I consented. I saw the end. It was written with fiery fingers on the wall. You know just like the words in the Bible. Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin! I don't suppose my words I saw meant the same thing. I don't know what the Bible words mean; but I knew the words I saw. They were burnt into my brain.

Bill kissed me. He kissed me again and again. The animal came up in him. It was fearful and yet it was to me a wonderful experience. Eventually, I, being a woman, lay quietly in his arms. I could smell his dirty body—the sweat of years was upon it. His clothes were unkempt. His shirt was open at the neck and he looked precisely what he was—a thug.

I was close to my revenge. And yet, I was not getting precisely what I started out to get. I had failed again, Peter. I failed. I loved this thing—this thug. Why do you suppose that happened? I awoke to him. It must have been that unconquerable force—Nature. You know I hate dirt. I have always hated dirt. I mean immorality. And yet here I was an honest

woman, a woman of instinct, doing this thing.

Bill kissed me as I say. Then he breathed a sigh. It came from his soul. If he had a soul, which I doubt. "Come, get up. It is late. We will go home."

I got up from the seat. He controlled me. I could not refuse. I wanted to. I wanted to run. I thought death was better than this thing I was going into with my eyes open. I knew Bill. He took my hand in his. We walked silently through the park. I went easily. There was no drawback on my part.

Down into the streets, from one evil-smelling way to another, through an alley, fetid with decayed dirt that lay in masses, then into another long row of old houses. This was called a street. It was silent. There was no sign of life anywhere. A rat ran across the gutter in front of us occasionally. I held to him with fear. Bill plodded on. He knew where he was. I was in a mist. My mind wouldn't work. If it had, I should have screamed.

How far I went I don't know. We stopped. Bill dragged me into a place. It was dark. I stumbled up one stairway, then up another. It must have been the top of the house, before Bill kicked a door open. He lit a light. I don't know what kind of light it was; but it struggled to dispel the gloom.

I can't tell you of this room. I've lived in it a long time. I've suffered in it. But I have been loved for myself. I did not fail there. I have known real love. It has paid me from that standpoint. When I die I will have known something most women miss. I had no children. In this I was fortunate.

My story is nearly finished, Peter. Bill, as I said, went to the penitentiary. I think it was my fault. I wished for something. He couldn't get it. We had nothing. He went to get it for me and got caught. Bill never failed me.

I left the country after Bill died. I am living in Paris. I am getting old. I am tired. But I don't regret. I have had my revenge.

I sit all day in the sun. I am always in my garden. I never go out. I have no reason to go. The outside does not attract me.

Goodbye, Peter. It is finished. And I would not have had it otherwise.

C.

Dear Peter :

I had decided not to write you anymore concerning myself or of what has happened to me in these intervening years. But woman-like I felt that there was more you should know, and I did not precisely feel as if I had had the last word. You must forbear with me and be patient.

As I told you in my last letter, Bill went to the penitentiary. I went with him on the train. The sheriff thought I was his wife. He commiserated with me and allowed me to sit next to Bill all the way. Bill was pitiful. I felt for him, for it was so unnecessary for him to be in the position he was in. I would have given Bill a living but I was afraid. He would not have believed me. He would have thought that I had some other man. Bill would have killed me and then you would have been free. I never intended that. I would not have had that happen.

You should have sat back of us and heard Bill swear what he would do after he got out. Twenty years! Can you imagine anybody laying plans for something to happen in twenty years? Bill did not get out. Poor animal, he

died in the place. I buried him. And curiously enough I wept for him when he was placed in the ground. I buried with him my one great love. But I had learned what love meant. I don't mean love surrounded with riches, but love that animates the breast of just a man. It is different.

When he was buried and a small stone placed at his head, I left the country. I came to Paris and I have lived here ever since. I should like to have you see the place. It is beautiful. I have a great house. And in it I have one room with a divan and a light back of it. I have in front of the divan a fireplace. It is kept lit all the time, even in the warmest weather. I look into it a great deal. I build even now hopes and castles that will never be realities.

I see in its blue flame, when the light is out and a quiet has settled upon the streets and only an occasional wayfarer goes by, a castle, and in its walls I place you, Peter—and the boy. I see my life as it might have been. I should not have known Bill. I should have had a different kind of love, not of the same value, but still I imagine it might have sufficed; it might have held me to my own. It would have done for I would not have known Bill—Bill the cave man.

Have you, I wonder, ever thought of this?

Have you ever considered how dreadfully wasted your life has been and how lonely?

I have a garden back of this house. French windows open out upon it. Down in its depths, where I love to go, I have had placed trees like those I loved at home, greenswards of grass lead to paths and their borders are lined with flowers, almost the same kinds of flowers I had at home. A fountain plays and casts its waters into the air. I have a lodge keeper who bows when I enter the gates. He has a sinister smile. He, too, seems unhappy, but wise beyond comprehension, Peter.

Underneath, Peter, I want something I haven't got. I don't know what that is. I try to argue the thing out. I go carefully over every incident that has comprised my life. I try to blame myself. Sometimes I can and then at other times I cannot. It is curious the condition I am in.

I am not old, yet I feel old. I am only forty-odd years of age, and nowadays that is not age. I have no friends. I know no one. I must be lonely. I don't know.

I think a great deal of you. I think of your wasted life. I don't mean from the money standpoint. Which is the least thing in the world. For I experienced greater happiness living in a hovel, in dirt and in squalor, than

I did with a butler and the other servants. But your life, Peter, is over. You are sixty and more. Time is ready to take you back into itself and close its account with you. Soon you will be dead. And out of it all you have got nothing. I've followed your career with interest and amusement. I knew its futility. I knew what in your heart you wanted. You wanted me. And your cupidity and your philosophy had lost for you the greatest thing in your life—love.

Do you know, Peter, that after all these years of separation I feel that you ought to come to me? That in all this world you have no one to take care of you. I told you in one of my letters to you that no matter what comes into a woman's life, in her heart she lives alone with the man she gave herself to first. I am no different. I am only a woman, with all the frailties of a woman.

I don't believe that there is any quality in a woman which is stronger than the quality of pity. I pity you. You are such a sad waste—such a pitiable thing. At times, Peter, I loved you with all the fervor of a young mind. That is something. Bill was only a sporadic incident in my life. As a fact he only seared it—burnt it with horrors that it would have been better that I should not have known. Had I

not had the frailties of a woman I would not have gone with Bill; nature and its demands are too strong. Nature made me go with Bill. It was not of any volition of my own. If it had been I would not have gone.

Tizzia is with me. I've had her for the past few years. I hunted her up after I buried Bill. She is here beside me. She is looking over my shoulder as I write to you. She and I have become more than maid and mistress. I hold to her with eager hand. It is by her that I link myself with the past, with you and with the boy. I am weak. I wobble. I am not as I used to be. My strength is gone. The fight in me is over. I have suffered, Peter—suffered terribly.

I often wonder at the weakness of the human. We start with such assurance and we end so pitifully. I had strength. I had determination. I did the thing that now I know I should not have done and out of it I have gotten that thing *revenge*. It is only too true the words in the Bible—"Vengeance is mine saith the Lord." I have lost. I wonder what the proper course in life is, for what we do is always wrong. I tried and I failed.

Tizzia and I talked over this thing this morning and I write it hastily for fear I may again change and the old feeling might arouse itself in me and I would not put down here truly what

I feel. There is only one thing left in me that is like my old self and that is my absolute strength for the truth. That I think is my one saving grace.

Tizzia said slowly and with what I thought was wonderful clearness. "Now, Madame, I would write this. I would give Mr. Thorbald the chance. You would have done your duty. It is better. Why carry out a bad situation when it can be bettered?"

"But," I answered, "he will think me foolish, and weak. After all my bragging as to what I was going to do."

"We are all weak, Madame," she replied. "We are only human."

"What would you say, Tizzia?" I asked.

"This," she replied shortly.

"The door is open. I wait for you to come. I will be to you as I was before. We can forget the past. It is over. All that we did is done. I am sorry. That covers with me a multitude. We have both lost. We should try in these few years left us to regain what we have lost."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"I think so. It is direct," she answered me.

"I can't do that, Tizzia—I can't. I would feel that I had put all my entity into the balance and found it wanting."

"That has been your failure. Madame,

you've weighed and you have lost in the weighing too much already. You have lost your life."

"Suppose he should refuse?" I asked.

"It can't be helped. Then you must continue to suffer. It may be that he will. It depends on what his viewpoint may be. He may be too comfortable as he is. He may have put you out of his life. You may not occur to him at all."

"Shall I try?" I asked doubtfully.

"Yes, Madame. And you will," she replied.

And, Peter, I am sending you this. I will wait until you reply. The door, as Tizzia says, is open. I am not hard to find. I shall wait. And while I wait, I shall be abased; for I can not know what you will answer. But I shall hope.

I wonder, shall I fail in this as in everything else?

Good-night, Peter. Remember, I hope.

C.

Weeks went into months. A winter came and then spring. The birds went and then came back. Clarinda and Tizzia lived and waited. But no word came from Peter. They could not tell whether the letters Clarinda had written had reached him or not. Tizzia gave up. She thought that the separation had been too long. That Clarinda had gone out of Peter's mind—that if he remembered her at all it was only as one remembers a dream, indistinctly, without placement. She had died and been buried. Clarinda still hoped. She could not define why this condition remained with her. Hope kept her alive. Tizzia did not tell her that in her own belief the thing was done. Peter would not answer.

In June, on the same date that Clarinda had been married so many years before, on almost the same sort of day, the sun was bright. The warmth of the weather filled all the passersby with pleasure. The boulevards were lined with people. The little iron chairs that sat close to the iron tables were crowded. Gaiety and life permeated everything. In the distance here and there bands blared forth music. Clarinda sat in her garden under the shade of a pink

umbrella. There was not much change in her beauty. It was still there. Her eyes were as bright and shone with the same lustre. Behind them could be seen a queer knowledge. It shone forth in bitterness. The attitude of her body was different. Her figure was almost as slim.

Her eyes were gradually closed to the light. A soft haze came between her and the day. She was soothed by the sound of the fountain that played beyond her. A bird sang in a tree. Tizzia sat close to her upon a stool at her feet. Peace, ineffable in its entirety closed about them. Clarinda slept. Tizzia watched her, not a sound disturbed the quiet. A gate clashed on its hinges. A window opened from the porch of the house. It swung to again and made almost as much clatter as the gate, then slowly and evenly two men walked down from the porch and came on through the garden. They came as if they knew every step of the way. There was no hesitancy in their advance. Tizzia did not hear them. She did not move. Clarinda sighed in her sleep. A smile crept over her face. She made a slight movement of her body as if settling herself in some deep remembrance. The smile on her face widened, and her lips spread apart showing her teeth. A great beauty settled down upon her. Tizzia looked up at her, and shook her head slowly.

A new hope came into her heart. She thought that he might come. How wonderful. A probability of joy that would come filled Tizzia with anxiety. She feared it would not happen, it had been so long.

Tizzia sat and looked at her. Then suddenly she heard the steps of the men, and she sprang from the stool and raised herself. She looked up the path. Her face became pale. She shook with emotion.

“At last!” she exclaimed. Tizzia advanced towards them.

“Yes, we are here. It has been long. But we are here,” said the older man.

“She is asleep. Shall I go to her?”

“No!” answered the older of the two men. “I will go to her.”

The younger man stopped. He looked towards Clarinda. His face was drawn. A great anxiety seemed to bear down upon him. He seemed uncertain as he stood beside Tizzia.

The older man, bent by the weight of his years, strode painfully over to Clarinda. He stood in front of her. Steadily he looked down upon her. Her lips were still parted in a smile. A faint color was spread over her cheeks. To Peter they looked still smooth. He could only see an indefinite change that all the years had planted upon her; he saw her as she was the

day she left him. He still remembered the cruelty of her words. They had burnt themselves into his soul, and they came back to him with even as great poignancy as if he had just listened to them.

Clarinda moved. Her hand stretched out in front of her as if she were reaching for something. It fell to her side. The smile went from her face. Peter did not move. Slowly with effort she opened her eyes. The light dazzled her as she looked at the man standing in front of her. At first she did not comprehend, then gradually it broke in upon her. She saw Peter. Her breath came from her in gasps. She could not speak.

Peter said slowly, "I am here. I have brought the boy. I have come for you, Clarinda."

Clarinda gasped. She could not move. She lay inert in her chair, and heard his words. But she could not comprehend them. To her they were only words. It seemed to her as if some ghost had stepped out of the garden and confronted her. Gradually as if she had been steeped in a tepid bath the drops of perspiration gathered on her face.

Peter did not move, or say anything, but seemed to be waiting. Slowly Clarinda found her voice, which was weak and uncertain. It

came from her in a whisper as she stammered.

“At last it is you! How—wonderful! And the boy.” Clarinda fell back into her chair. A great pallor spread over her cheeks, and with an effort she shook the tide from her. She arose from her chair, and staggered slightly. Peter stretched out his hand as if to stay her. As his hand came toward her, she moved slightly back.

“No!—No!—Peter,” she said. “It is not for you to forgive. My greatest sin has not been against you but against the boy. It lies with him, so let him think.”

Peter turned from her, and motioned to the younger man who was talking in a low tone to Tizzia. He beckoned to him and the young man advanced. He came until he stood quite close to his father.

Peter said quietly, “This is your mother.”

“You never told me, Father, where we were coming. I am unprepared. I don’t understand, I am so shocked. How beautiful she is. This is the first time in all my life I have ever heard you speak of her.”

“Yes,” answered Clarinda, “I am your mother.” She turned to Peter. “Peter,” she said, “you are bigger than I am, and after all you are a man. I have failed again.”

“What is done, is done,” he replied. “There

are only a few years in front of me. I am well over sixty. You and I and the boy will go back. We will try."

The boy knelt at his mother's feet, and touched the hem of her dress, then he turned his eyes up to her.

"I've wanted a mother so much. I've dreamed of a mother, and at last I've found you."

Clarinda wept. The tears went down her face, and she did not try to stem the torrent.

"We shall be happy," the boy went on. "Never again shall we be separated. I am so happy! You are so beautiful—so wonderful!"

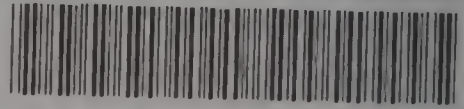
Clarinda stretched down her hand to him. He arose from the ground, and she took him in her arms. He kissed her. It was her boy. The fruit of her body.

Peter smiled.

THE END

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